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cover illustration

Maggie Cheung in *Irma Vep* (Olivier Assayas, 1996). Zeitgeist Films, all rights reserved.

Representations of the Victorian age: interior spaces and the detail of domestic life in two adaptations of Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*

IRIS KLEINECKE

¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 4.

For our house is our corner of the world (Gaston Bachelard)¹

The past is encapsulated in interior space and the detail of domestic life – or so it appears when watching the opening of ITV's adaptation of John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* (Granada/WGBH Boston, 2002). But what past is revealed here? As the opening credits for the first episode of the drama appear, so does the image of a large townhouse. A caption at the bottom of the screen reads 'London, 1874', placing the house in a specific space and time. The opening serves to introduce the various family members of the Forsyte clan, but within the first five minutes of the drama, it also establishes no less than six different locations.

Gaston Bachelard has addressed the way in which our perception of houses, of interior spaces, shapes our memories, our thoughts and dreams. In his chapter on the miniature he claims: 'This nucleizing nucleus is a world in itself. The miniature deploys to the dimensions of a universe. Once more, large is contained in small'.² While Bachelard refers to the experience of seeing a landscape through a glass nucleus, through a bubble in a pane of glass, and the way what is seen is distorted and transformed, making the nucleus an imaginary centre of a world, in some ways this is also true of all miniatures. They focus our attention on the small and the personal, rather than the gigantic, but the reduction of dimensions does not correspond to a reduction of significance. Rather,

² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

3 Ibid., p. 155.

the small comes to signify the large, becomes a microcosm encapsulating a macrocosm. Surely the same is the case in the representation of the past through domestic spaces and arguably even more so in relation to television as showing a world in miniature for consumption in our living rooms? The minuscule, as Bachelard observes, is 'a narrow gate, [that] opens up an entire world. The details of a thing can be the sign of a new world which, like all worlds, contains the attributes of greatness. Miniature is one of the refuges of greatness'.³ In a similar way television becomes a 'narrow gate', or rather, as it has often been described, a window to the world, containing 'greatness' but representing and distributing it through the small, the domestic, the private, containing it within the ordinary. In the relationship between the television image and the space of viewing, the home as the private domestic space of viewing becomes an arena for the viewing of the space represented on the screen. While, in the case of much current affairs television, this television space may be a public arena, an image of the wider world, in the case of television drama and in particular period drama such as *The Forsyte Saga* it, more often than not, is a private, domestic space that comes to represent a larger, less graspable concept of the past.

If a text can be what Bachelard sees as 'a narrow gate' to a whole world, then Galsworthy's saga is certainly an example of a text that is trying to capture a whole era. The opening paragraph of the first chapter of *The Man of Property* clearly shows this family as a miniature of Victorian society:

Those privileged to be present at a family festival of the Forsytes have seen that charming and instructive sight – an upper-middle-class family in full plumage. But whosoever of these favoured persons has possessed the gift of psychological analysis (a talent without monetary value and properly ignored by the Forsytes), has witnessed a spectacle, not only delightful in itself, but illustrative of an obscure human problem. In plainer words, he has gleaned from a gathering of this family, no branch of which had a liking for the other, between no three members of whom existed anything worthy of the name of sympathy – evidence of that mysterious concrete tenacity which renders a family so formidable a unit of society, so clear a reproduction of society in miniature. He has been admitted to a vision of the dim roads of social progress, has understood something of patriarchal life, of the swarmings of savage hordes, of the rise and fall of nations.⁴

4 John Galsworthy, *The Forsyte Saga*, vol. 1, *The Man of Property* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 11.

Adaptations are necessarily determined by their literary source, and the *Forsyte Saga* is a novel about British society at a particular point in time, about social change and about the transition from the Victorian age into the twentieth century as seen through the story of one family. This emphasis on family life as slice of Victorian life is carried over into the adaptation of the literary text and creates a flow of information, not from the public to the private but from the private (as personalized history) to the private (of the home), as intimate as a peek into a neighbour's living

room from the privacy of your own, an intimate way of viewing that I will readdress at the end of this article.

By looking at two adaptations of Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*, the 1967 BBC adaptation (BBC/MGM Television, 1967) and the 2002 ITV version, I aim to analyze the way the Victorian past, in particular in the ITV drama, is represented.⁵ As adaptation theory has long acknowledged, even in the case of attempted faithfulness to the literary source, adaptations are equally determined by their medium and their historical moment. Thus, although the novel already emphasizes issues of class, gender and nation as embodied in one family, owing to institutional and historical contexts, the actual representations of the past in the two adaptations of the *Forsyte Saga* differ drastically. To examine those differences as well as explore possible explanations for them, I will specifically concentrate on an analysis of institutional backgrounds and, through a comparison of both dramas, aim to relate the treatment of space and domesticity to changing attitudes to the past, in particular the Victorian past, as well as medium-specific and institutional changes. I will conclude by returning to my initial thoughts on the representation of the past through domestic spaces within the medium of television.

'The past can never be transcribed, but has always to be re-invented', noted Raphael Samuel, one of the most prominent British historians to support 'history from below' as the attempt to recover the history of ordinary people.⁶ Samuel argued that history is an organic, social form of knowledge, its meanings open to the changing preoccupations of the present. The past, and our knowledge of it, is not fixed but in continuous motion, always existing as the product of a negotiation of relevance to the here and now. As such, modern representations and re-animations of the past serve as branches of an unofficial, popular history. This approach has been influential in encouraging alternative ways of looking at heritage and consequently at representations of the past in film and television which do not condemn but rather see the potential of these representations as reflections of a moment in time and space. His notion of the production of knowledge as a social activity that is inevitably a product of the present, has also informed my own work on the representation of the past on television.

Another such analysis is Julianne Pidduck's analysis of subjectivity and space in the costume film in which she identifies 'the "memory images" that circulate in the moment of production and consumption'.⁷ By addressing period drama's textual treatment of space and place and juxtaposing it with its cultural and historical contexts, she highlights the complexity of the resonances between the representation of the past and the present. Pidduck's approach to the costume film is instructive, and in the context of my own work I am particularly interested in her reading of inside and outside spaces.⁸ Her work addresses an aspect of recent classic novel adaptations often ignored in critical writing on period drama – it focuses on the dynamics of space as an extension of narrative development. Unlike other debates around British heritage cinema in

5 I will, in this article, limit my analysis to the first and second of Galsworthy's Forsyte novels, *A Man of Property* and *In Chancery* as the nineteenth-century part of the family saga. The last episodes in question are episode 12 of the BBC series, 'Birth of a Forsyte', and episode 6 of the first season of the ITV adaptation.

6 Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 411.

7 Julianne Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film: Space, Place and the Past* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), p. 4.

8 Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film* and 'Of Windows and Country Walks: Frames of Space and Movement in 1990s Austen Adaptations', *Screen* vol. 39, no. 4 (1998), pp. 381–400.

particular, which tend to contrast visual spectacle with the potential critical treatment of narrative, her analysis of space, class, race and gender suggests a continuity between the two elements and aims for a consideration of the productivity of space and movement in representation.⁹

While Pidduck's study is most explicit in its approach to period drama through an analysis of the use of space, other studies have drawn attention to the codified nature of visual aspects of the representation of period spaces. Sarah Cardwell highlights the intertextual nature of visual representation in the classic novel adaptation on television as drawing on the reproduction and interpretation of 'types'.¹⁰ Yet another illuminating study of the use of period detail is offered by John Caughie who bemoans the disdain with which the classic serial is often treated in academic television criticism and suggests that behind this contempt for the literary adaptation lurks 'a resistance to the feminine, a masculine dominant in the critical vocabulary which has been most marked in the criticism of television drama.'¹¹ He is interested in thinking about detail as part of a poetics that is specific to television and refers to Naomi Schor's observations on the privileging of the sublime (as anti-detail), as the manly, noble and dignified over detail as associated with both the feminine and the undignified.¹² Moreover, as Schor explains, detail participates 'in a larger semantic network, bounded on the one side by the ornamental, with its traditional connotations of effeminacy and decadence, and on the other, by the everyday, whose 'prosiness' is rooted in the domestic sphere of social life presided over by women'.¹³ Caughie proposes that not only does period drama have the potential to unsettle, to create uneasiness and counteract illusion through visual tropes, but it also offers rewards associated less with narrative and more with a pleasure gained from close attention to detail and a kind of detached awareness of spectacle.

Few studies on the subject appear, however, to focus their attention on the home, on private space, and the representation of domestic interiors and their impact within specific media. There is a wide range of criticism concerned with architecture and, if slightly less well covered, domestic spaces and interior design in relation to history, social sciences and philosophy. Domestic interiors have been discussed in relation to the formation of individual and collective identities, formed through the constructed and inhabited space of the home, and have aided the analysis of class and gender. As such, discussions of private spaces and their manifestations have also proved fruitful in the study of literature. However, significant studies of the representation of period spaces and domestic interiors in adaptations and period drama that go beyond the analysis of the transformation of word into images and instead address the medium-specificity and intertextuality of their representation in a particular (television) context are still rare.

Interior design is the creation of private space through which individuals express themselves to themselves and to others. The home is

- 9 For examples of these other debates see Andrew Higson, 'Representing the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film', in Lester Friedman (ed.), *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 109–129; Tana Wollen, 'Over our shoulders: nostalgic screen fictions for the 1980s', in John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (eds), *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 178–193.
- 10 Sarah Cardwell, *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).
- 11 John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 207.
- 12 Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 12.
- 13 Schor in Caughie, *Television Drama*, p. 213.

¹⁴ Jane Root, 'The set in the sitting room', in Matthew Geller (ed.), *From Receiver to Remote Control: The TV Set* (New York, NY: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), pp. 45–50 and Lynn Spigel, 'The domestic gaze', in Geller (ed.), *From Receiver to Remote Control*, pp. 11–22. Also, Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁵ *The Forsyte Saga*, Episode 1, BBC, 1967.

the site of the personal, the site of identity constructed and staged. As such, interior spaces and the realm of the home are formed by individual and collective identities to the same extent as they, as spaces, have aided the formation of those very identities. While the cross-influencing between self and society taking place within the home can be observed in any construction of private space, I am, in this article, most interested in the complex formation of home and identity on television. After all, as critics such as Lynn Spigel and Jane Root have pointed out, television is a medium associated with and consumed within the home.¹⁴ Moreover, in the light of the noticeable concern of television with interior decorating, DIY and home improvement, it seems pertinent to think about period drama and its own often noted concern with authentic period design and space in relation to this television trend, even more so as, with recent period reality television shows, both strands appear to have crossbred into a new form of television. The ongoing popularity of DIY and lifestyle programming raises questions about the nature of interior design and the formation of identity as influencing, but equally also influenced, and constructed by television. This potential link between identity and interiors is emphasized by programmes that transcend the interior design realm to branch out into a type of self-help programming through the transformation of domestic life, and it is in programmes such as *1900 House* (Wall to Wall Television for Channel 4, 1999), *The Edwardian Country House* (Wall to Wall Television for Channel 4, 2002) or *The Regency House Party* (Wall to Wall Television for Channel 4, 2004) that the gap between lifestyle and period drama is bridged. This highlights the need for an analysis of period spaces in television drama that acknowledges intertextual elements cutting across genres. Period drama needs to be understood, not only as part of its cultural and political context, but equally as television and as influenced by specific television environments.

In England today there is no more charming and instructive sight than an upper middle-class family in full plumage. This particular family is called Forsyte and they live in Park Lane.¹⁵

This is how the voiceover introduces the Forsyte family in the first episode of the 1967 BBC adaptation of the saga. A caption informs the viewer that this is London and that it is the year 1879. Birdsong is heard, while the camera takes in the location, presumably Hyde Park. The setting is generic and public; various people are seen strolling through the gardens. The opening is not only interesting for the way in which the voiceover places the serial historically through its use of literary techniques in a period in which television's roots in radio drama and theatre were still more pronounced, but for its treatment of the narrative. As in Galsworthy's novel, the viewer is not only made aware of the identity of the group of people but of their class and social status. Moreover, in combination with the voiceover, the public location and initial anonymity of the people in the park suggest a critical distance and

a sense of control. A family is picked out by the narrator and, in extension, by the audience, to represent the prosperous middle class of Victorian England. Although the voiceover is only present at the start of the episode, this sense of detachment, of observation rather than involvement, will persist, distancing the audience slightly and inviting critical viewing.

Cutting to an open carriage and capturing each of the four passengers individually, mirroring both the description of the Forsytes' residences and the sentiment of a conversation in the first chapter of *The Forsyte Saga – The Man of Property*,¹⁶ the voiceover continues introducing the family by linking their social status as a wealthy and business-minded middle-class family to property and location:

Indeed all the Forsytes live around the park. It's fashionable and property value is rising steadily. Although each Forsyte is impressive enough singly, their true flavour can only be appreciated when they gather together at one or other of their well-appointed houses. . . . Today the gathering is at my uncle Timothy's in Bayswater Road – yes, my uncle, for I too am a Forsyte. They call me Young Jolyon because my father Old Jolyon is at present head of the family.¹⁷

Again, the voiceover creates detachment. The narrator, now identified as Young Jolyon, is on the inside; we are not. He is introducing the audience to a lifestyle and a world they are not part of. At this point the carriage has arrived at its destination and the passengers have entered a house. The camera cuts to a drawing room and Young Jolyon introduces each family member and their background, while the camera captures them one by one as they socialize. The first five minutes of the serial have thus succeeded in introducing the Forsyte family, their status and, perhaps most importantly, our position in relation to them; voiceover and visual representation here work together to form an image of the Victorian age.

Significant in this context is the choice to use a character's voiceover instead of the omniscient narrator who occupies this role in Galsworthy's saga. Although the use of the voiceover device shows a still very strong reliance on literary techniques that reveals the origins of the classic serial in radio drama adaptation, the effect is also one of distancing – it causes the viewer to observe from the outside. Giving the words of an omniscient narrator to Young Jolyon changes their impact and singles him out. His voiceover identifies the Forsytes as Victorian middle class and, by implying that he is not a typical Forsyte, Young Jolyon constructs himself as a 'modern' man. The viewer is encouraged to identify with him. His dislike of his cousin Soames is thus symbolic in two ways. Soames comes to represent both the 'old' – Victorian England that needs to be overcome and the wealthy middle class and their values – which stands in direct conflict to Young Jolyon's perhaps more bohemian desire for independence and freedom from outdated social norms and conformity. His point of view is emphasized by his control over the

¹⁶ Galsworthy, *The Man of Property*, p. 26.

¹⁷ *The Forsyte Saga*, Episode 1, BBC, 1967.

narrative at this point, which is signalled as the camera moves around the room, framing members of the family clan while Young Jolyon introduces them. The claustrophobic, cluttered feel of the room further enhances the sense of constraint and entrapment. What is before us is a tableau of a different life, observed critically by him and by us. It is only at the very end of the scene that the camera includes him, just as he introduces himself as part of the family: 'I too am a Forsyte'. His social positioning is peculiar and telling in this context. He is a rebel, not accepting of the social confines of Victorian bourgeois society, yet at the same time he is safely and reassuringly middle class. This position as socially progressive yet 'belonging' makes him the ideal object of identification for a middle-class audience. I suggest that, even though this biased representation of Young Jolyon and Victorian society is in keeping with what is known of Galsworthy's own views on the period, this aspect was primarily elaborated because of its relevance to social changes in the 1960s. Young Jolyon's attitudes towards Victorian norms and stifling social conventions mirror conflicts and debates of the time. His privileged role in the adaptation mirrors an acting out of conflicts between tradition and social change that, within the more traditional and conservative confines of the classic serial, corresponds to the social awareness of the up-to-date and politically and socially progressive Wednesday Play.

Indeed, the historical context of the adaptation is influential in other ways. The production of *The Forsyte Saga* almost coincides with the launch of BBC2 and, as Lez Cooke explains, although BBC2 had been launched in April 1964 it was still trying to establish itself.¹⁸ It was still not received in all parts of the country and, moreover, the service still required an adjustment of the signal of the television set. As part of the attempt to create an identity for the channel and in response to increasing competition from ITV, a new slot was allocated on BBC2 for classic serial adaptations on Saturday evenings. While the traditional Sunday teatime slot was bound by its intended family audience and was limited in its choice and treatment of novels, the new later time slot allowed for a more adult treatment of texts and for longer episodes. This created a shift in the treatment of classic novels from early evening educational programming for the whole family to a stronger emphasis on drama and a sometimes more daring choice of material. *The Forsyte Saga* as a prestigious yet popular programme with more daring adult themes was ideal to promote the new channel.

This more progressive and daring tone is evident in the serial's approach to the narrative, for example in the handling of Soames's rape of his wife Irene. Even though not explicit by today's standards, the scene showed Soames forcing himself on his wife, ripping her blouse and wrestling her onto the bed. Her struggling against him is shown in a medium close-up, his words clearly conveying his intentions: 'Any man can have you, can't they? Well, I can too! You're my wife. You're my wife!'¹⁹ The camera cuts away to the street in front of the house, where a

¹⁸ Lez Cooke, *British Television Drama: A History* (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), p. 83.

¹⁹ *The Forsyte Saga*, Episode 6, 'Decisions', BBC 1967.

beggar woman is playing a barrel organ, the delight in her face and the cheerful music a strong contrast to what we assume is happening at the same time inside the house. Again, by juxtaposing the scene with the beggar woman in the street, the attention is drawn to the issue of class. Thus, similar to the way in which Young Jolyon's presence serves to distance the audience from the society that is the object of observation, here the beggar woman's jarring presence within the scene serves as a distancing device. Without providing any possibility of identification, the viewer here becomes an outside observer. Thus, even while the narrative focuses on bourgeois middle class life in Victorian England, the stereotype of a 'solid', 'moral' middle class as the backbone of England is undermined and deconstructed. Another cut brings the viewer face to face with Soames, his face registering shock and horror, and a close-up of Irene, weeping on the bed. To the sound of Irene's sobbing, the camera cuts between his and her face. The last image before the credits roll at the end of the episode is a close-up of her hand on the bed, slowly clenching and unclenching.

The scene is not sexually explicit but it also does not shy away from the subject matter, instead showing the brutality of Soames's attack on his wife with simple means, making the scene remarkable in its straightforward dealing with the subject of rape in marriage. By comparison, in the novel the incident is merely hinted at when a guilty and shamed Soames is attempting to go through his business the morning after:

He was strangely haunted by the recollection of her face, from before which, to soothe her, he had tried to pull her hands – of her terrible smothered sobbing, the like of which he had never heard, and still seemed to hear; and he was still haunted by the odd, intolerable feeling of remorse and shame he had felt, as he stood looking at her by the flame of the single candle, before silently slinking away.²⁰

²⁰ Galsworthy, *The Man of Property*, p. 264.

The portrayal of the scene here focuses on Soames's stirrings of guilty conscience while the BBC serial instead addressed the horror of the act itself, spelling out Irene's entrapment in her marriage and hinting at the wrongness of Victorian social norms that imprison her and give her little agency over her life. Prepared through Young Jolyon's position and further distanced through the jarring presence of the beggar woman with her barrel organ in the scene, the viewer is here encouraged to recognize the critique of outmoded and potentially dangerous social norms, and to side and sympathize with Irene's situation. Again I suggest that, even though not an interpretation that goes against the spirit of the novel, the representation of the scene can be understood in direct relation to the television environment at that time, rather than faithfulness to the literary source. The treatment of the rape can thus be seen as a response to the more challenging and competitive televisual context and a social awareness introduced by programmes such as those shown as part of the Wednesday Play. Even though *The Forsyte Saga*, as a classic serial, is

part of a traditionally more 'conservative' strand of programming, the specific background to the production as part of its time and institutional context is evident in its approach to the Victorian age as a period of social constraint and hypocrisy and its portrayal of the individual as entrapped by stifling and potentially cruel norms and conventions. The final coupling of the series is here anticipated in the way in which the two non-Victorian Forsytes are established and aligned in their suffering under Victorian social constraints. Here I want to move on to a discussion of the 2002 adaptation of *The Forsyte Saga*.

Multiple adaptations of the same novel are a common occurrence and it is recognized that there is a limited corpus of what is termed 'classic' works of literature from which adaptation draws. However, at least partly because Galsworthy's novels have fallen into relative obscurity, although the ITV series is only the second adaptation of *The Forsyte Saga*, press coverage and response to the drama suggest a problematization of the notion of origin. Thus, despite the denial of producer Sita Williams, who tries to emphasize the serial's status as a literary adaptation rather than a remake of the earlier BBC drama, media as well as viewer comments and reactions suggest that the ITV's *Forsyte Saga* is generally considered a remake of the earlier BBC series.²¹ Rather than eclipsing and replacing the earlier version, the new adaptation seemed to bring the earlier serial back into the limelight and seemed to co-exist side by side with it. This suggests a case in which an adaptation has eclipsed the original text and has taken its place in the public consciousness. This complex relationship between literary source and different adaptations leads to a situation in which the ITV production is competing directly with the earlier BBC drama.

Again, the treatment of Irene's rape serves to emphasize this point. Despite Williams's repeated claims that the ITV series is an adaptation of Galsworthy's text, rather than choose to approach the scene in the implicit rather than explicit way given in the novel, the channel opted for a similar treatment to that in the BBC version. Considering the relationship of the new adaptation to its predecessor, it is likely that this choice was motivated by the need to situate the drama in relation to the BBC. Faced with the reputation of the scene, to offer what could be perceived as 'less' might have given the wrong impression regarding the channel's setting itself up as progressive in relation to the BBC, while to show 'more' could have been interpreted as sensationalist and in bad taste. At the same time, the portrayal of the scene notably lacks the element of class awareness which was an undercurrent in the earlier BBC adaptation. The shift here is deliberate. Sita Williams, in the *Official Companion to The Forsyte Saga*, discusses how she understood Galsworthy's novel:

The first thing that struck me, and that would strike any modern reader picking up *The Man of Property*, is that it's about money, materialism and desire – which feel like very contemporary subjects. In a way

²¹ See Rupert Smith's *Radio Times* cover story, 'A saga for today', *Radio Times*, 6–12 April 2002.

22 Rupert Smith, *The Forsyte Saga: The Official Companion* (London: Granada, 2002), pp. 38–9.

23 Jacqueline Concitore, 'Forsyte Saga remake goes for the 'youthful passion'. <http://www.current.org/drama/drama0119forsyte.html> (accessed 8 September 2004).

24 Williams in Smith, 'A saga for today', p. 23.

those seem much more the obsessions of this decade than they were of the sixties, when the BBC adaptation was made. We think of the sixties as an idealistic time, whereas our time seems more greedy and competitive.²²

Her explanation again highlights the interconnectedness of institutional and cultural/historical determinations at work here. Seen in this light, the differences in the portrayal of the rape scene become a reflection of a different attitude to the past, a different reading of it which is as bound by temporal and spatial specificities as the earlier BBC adaptation. The ITV adaptation, as a product of its specific time and place, continually builds on and responds to its own situatedness, culturally and in relation to the BBC drama, and models itself in relation to these factors.

Another result of institutional conflict is the sometimes deliberate distancing from the overbearing older series, as also noticeable in Williams' comments. Thus, when talking about ITV's strategy, although not mentioning the BBC adaptation, she is clearly referring to it when she notes: 'I don't see the point anymore [in casting older] . . . They're meant to be young and sexy and good-looking. We've gone for the youthful passion.'²³ Although 'youthfulness' is an attribute of many recent period dramas, the comment is interesting in its implications regarding the new drama's aims and aspirations. Williams's comment suggests a response to the earlier series and its status which implies that, in comparison to ITV's own effort, the BBC adaptation is not only dated but also stuffy and 'unsexy'. Taking on an adaptation that has become a classic and that has been associated with both 'quality' and the BBC is a decision that is clearly motivated by a desire to address ITV's status in relation to the institution of the BBC. ITV constructs a distinct institutional identity that links it to the BBC by means of notions of quality and respectability and simultaneously rejects it by setting itself apart as more 'up to date' by means of its representation of the literary material. The series thus responds not only to the earlier BBC drama but also to wider institutional tensions. The different look of the serial and its approach to its characters and the period illuminate this issue further.

The visual style displayed in the ITV *Forsyte Saga* is not unfamiliar to the classic serial viewer. Adaptations such as *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC, 1995), *Middlemarch* (BBC, 1994) or *Daniel Deronda* (BBC, 2002) have turned the visual splendour and lavish and elaborate mise-en-scene of this type of adaptation into a period drama staple that transcends the context of television and is a common feature of both film and television costume drama. Quality is the key term here. Thus Williams is keen to point out ITV's long-standing tradition in period drama:

The fact is that ITV and Granada have a very strong record in costume dramas and literary adaptations. . . . I know everyone automatically thinks, "Costume drama . . . BBC," but it's a misconception and at least 20 years out of date.²⁴

However, a look at the specific context of the ITV *Forsyte Saga* allows for an understanding of the stylistic choices of the drama that goes beyond the acknowledgement of familiar visual styles. Thus, a look at the opening of the ITV *Forsyte Saga* clearly shows the different approach to the period. As mentioned earlier, the opening sequences of the ITV adaptation establish no less than six different locations – outside Stanhope Gate, the nursery, the staircase, the drawing room, outside the James's house in Park Lane, and their dining room. There is an obvious shift away from the use of voiceover to an emphasis on the visual. To the accompaniment of music, the camera, through a number of fades, moves closer to an invitingly lit house and eventually focuses on a single lit window on the first floor. A further cut changes the location to the inside of the room, a nursery, where a young woman is sitting by a child's bed. The child appears to be ill and is sleeping and the woman is keeping watch. The woman, as the audience will find out in time, is Helene Hilmer, a governess who will eventually marry the master of the house, Young Jolyon. The child is his daughter June. The room is lit only by a candle, which gives a soft light that obscures the space of the nursery while creating a flattering glow on Helene's face. There is a cut away from the room and a man, later identified as Young Jolyon, is hurrying up a grand staircase, which, unlike the nursery, is brightly lit.

The adaptation clearly focuses on location and dialogue; it relies on conversation and visual clues to introduce the main characters. Young Jolyon being greeted by a servant as 'sir' introduces him as the master of the house. At the same time the lavish decor of the hall and stairs suggests his wealth. Stepping into the nursery, he is again addressed as 'sir' by Helene. This establishes her as the governess rather than his wife. Young Jolyon's later brief conversation with his father about his decision not to attend his cousin Winifred's engagement party establishes the relationship between father and son as jovial and suggests an already existing dislike of the wider family, which they share. Lastly, the same scene, through the fact that Young Jolyon only converses with his wife in the more 'formal' space of the drawing room and by contrasting their relationship with his earlier encounter with Helene in the nursery, suggests a lack of intimacy in his relationship with his wife and establishes his marriage as formal and cold. The same is the case at Winifred's engagement party, where family members are introduced through costume, glances and social interaction. Like the BBC version, the serial thus manages to introduce most of its extensive cast in the first five minutes and to pinpoint Young Jolyon and Soames as central characters, but this introduction appears to be more tied to the actual space in which the characters move. The opening oscillates between intimate and social spaces, the privacy of the nursery and the social gathering of the dinner party, between the private and the public. The emphasis is here on *showing* rather than telling and the viewer does not enjoy a special link to any of the characters or inside information. Instead of being guided by a narrator, the viewer is in a position of creating

meaning through watching. Rather than class awareness and critique, this adaptation aims to involve the audience not in the role of social critics but as explorers of the past. The emphasis on deciphering visual and narrative clues turns the viewer into an amateur detective, a position that is emphasized by the adaptation's treatment of interior spaces and domestic life. Thus, narratively, the new adaptation is still about transition and social change but, without the voiceover commentary, the period as such becomes at once more immediate. Without the clear 'them/us' division the period appears more modern and the gap between the present and the past is, although not overcome, not emphasized. But how is the past represented in the serial and how and why does this representation differ from the image of the Victorian past drawn in the BBC serial?

Some of the adaptation's 'look' can no doubt be understood as rooted in institutional and medium-specific concerns. Technological changes, shifts in audience expectation and taste, as well as the changing television environment have caused shifts in the classic novel adaptation. Faced with an increasingly multi-channel environment, the struggle for viewers increases as public service broadcasters in the late 1990s have to compete with commercial television in the advent of satellite and cable. The Communication Bill, a first draft of which appeared in 2002, gives ITV, as a commercial terrestrial channel, a lower public service remit but at the same time the channel still has to provide a range of high-quality and diverse programming. The ITV *Forsythe Saga* can be understood in this context. ITV is in a position of having to supply programming that is perceived as high quality and at the same time sets itself up as a commercial channel competing with the BBC for audiences. This tension results in ITV trying to fulfil its public service remit but simultaneously aiming for a more commercial, popular identity. This is noticeable in ITV's attitude to the serial. Although the channel is careful to emphasize the drama's status as a literary adaptation, the treatment of the text suggests other influences. This results in a play with existing television formats.

Cooke suggests that the BBC *Forsythe Saga* can be seen as a kind of literary soap opera.²⁵ I am not denying that the drama, as well as the novel, through the multiple storylines and focus on one large family, bears elements of the soap, and indeed Root points to the particular skill of television in dealing with the 'minutiae of human relationships', saying that 'this is true even of programs which claim to be about a majestic sweep of history, such as *Brideshead Revisited*. . . . Really, when it comes down to it, their stories concern personal relationships and families.'²⁶ However, as Root implies, this is arguably an element traceable in most television programmes, and other aspects, such as the voiceover which served to guide audience identification, suggest a strong link to the radio adaptation rather than popular television genres in the earlier drama. Moreover, due to the negative implications of the term in the 1960s, the series would not have been deliberately associated with a

²⁵ Cooke, *British Television Drama*, p. 83.

²⁶ Root, 'The set in the sitting room', p. 47.

genre such as the soap opera. In comparison, in the ITV adaptation, as in modern soap opera, the viewer is left to 'pick' between a number of equally flawed characters and, as noticeable in the opening sequence, interweaving multiple and equally weighted plot strands are set up right from the beginning. The soap opera is indeed only one of the popular genres that seem referenced in the recent adaptation. Thus, the serial's positioning of the viewer as observer and the emphasis on detection, imply a kind of 'hidden truth' that can be discovered in the image. The classic novel adaptation's stressing of period authenticity also bears resemblance to forms of documentary, such as the docudrama, while the interest in the detail of period space suggests a concern with the home and its representation that is more often found in lifestyle and home improvement programming. Moreover, as I will address in more detail later, the ITV *Forsyte Saga* displays a covert affinity with forms of reality television.

There's a lot of Victorian stuff around, but the Forsytes didn't live in Victorian buildings. They lived in old houses... There's a line in the script that mentions the fact that Soames is the first Forsyte for a generation actually to build a house; I think they felt much more at home in the buildings of an earlier generation.²⁷

The above quotation, taken from an interview with production designer Stephen Fineren and director Chris Menaul about the production of *The Forsyte Saga* and the search for suitable locations in Manchester, exemplifies the great care that was taken in the production of the ITV drama to remain in keeping with both the text and the period, and clearly shows the amount of attention paid to period authenticity.²⁸ Fineren continues to describe the search for the perfect Forsyte home:

Chris rejected a lot of the locations as being simply not grand enough. You have to remember that the houses that families like the Forsytes were living in, around Hyde Park, for instance, were enormous – they were real country houses in the heart of London. So we had to find existing country houses, like Croxteth Hall and Lyme Hall that provided façades of sufficient grandeur for a posh mansion in town. After that it was just a question of dressing them properly.²⁹

What is noteworthy here is the emphasis on grandeur and visual splendour that comes through in Fineren's comment. The interior spaces chosen for the adaptation are open, flooded with light and inviting. In comparison to the generous spaces of the ITV adaptation, the visual representation of space in the BBC drama reflects the narrative portrayal of the Victorian middle class as trapped in their own social conventions; the Victorian interiors seem oppressive, dark and ornamental, closing in on the characters (figure 1).

After the open spaces of the park, the drawing room during the family gathering feels particularly dark and, through an excess of both people and elaborate ornament, stifling and overcrowded, creating a need to escape rather than linger. In the light of present-day concerns with

27 Masterpiece Theatre, 'Production notes – location'. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/forsyte/notes.html#locations> (accessed 15 May 2004).

28 Some of the exteriors used included Croxteth Hall (James and Emily's house in Park Lane), Faulkner Square in Liverpool (standing in for Montpelier Square, home of Soames and Irene), Lyme Park and Tabley House in Knutsford, Cheshire.

29 Masterpiece Theatre, 'Production notes – location'.

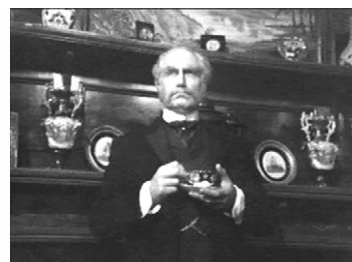
Figure 1
The cramped and dingy Victorian drawing room in episode 1 of *The Forsyte Saga* (Dir. James Cellan Jones and David Giles; produced by the BBC in association with MGM Television, 1967).



authenticity, it would be easy to dismiss the older BBC adaptation as depicting a Victorian age that is both dated and inauthentic. Yet the BBC adaptation of *The Forsyte Saga* was also acclaimed for its authentic period detail, and indeed, looking at the decor of Victorian middle-class interiors, the cluttered, claustrophobic interior spaces that dominate the 1967 adaptation seem very much in keeping with period decor, which was, after all, marked by an emphasis on the ornamental and decorative, and celebrated the drawing room of the home as the stage for the display of the public persona of its owners (figures 2 and 3).

Rather than marking the difference between authentic and inauthentic representations of the period, the differences between the two adaptations are rooted in contemporary attitudes towards the Victorian age and accordingly their representation of period spaces. Thus, while the static nature of the shots and the lack of editing in the earlier series are the result of technological limitations as well as television's affinity to the theatre, the almost claustrophobic interiors also serve to underline the depiction of the Victorian age as oppressive – as a period that needs to be overcome. Moreover, the excessively cluttered and cramped spaces come to signify oppression in other ways. Thus, mise-en-scene becomes a manifestation of Victorian social structures and conventions and at times can be seen as literally projecting itself between characters, crowding in on them and bearing over their relationships as if

Figures 2 and 3
A Victorian drawing room and fireplace at Rooksnest, Hertfordshire (from Alan T. Bradford, *The English Country House*, <http://www.conncoll.edu/ccacad/eng309/victorian/273.html> (accessed 2 December 2005); Old Jolyon in front of the fireplace at Uncle Timothy's in Bayswater Road, *The Forsyte Saga* (1967).



30 Garrett Stewart, 'Film's Victorian retrofit', *Victorian Studies*, vol. 38, no. 2 (Winter 1995), pp. 153–98.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 158.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 154.

33 Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, p. 3.

to separate, to remove privacy and prevent intimacy; mise-en-scene comes to signify the 'clutter' of the past (figure 4).

In comparison, the ITV adaptation emphasizes the lavishness of not only the Victorian age but also, as Fineren's comment highlights, of an earlier age, of Regency England. The choice is significant, not only because of the architectural differences between the Regency and the Victorian age, but also because of the differing associations and expectations towards the two periods. In his analysis of the filmic representation of 'the Victorian', Garrett Stewart discusses what he perceives as the conflicting attitudes towards the Victorian age.³⁰ He sees them as the result of a set of motivations and perspectives which are centred around the axioms of cultural imaging, generic inheritance and photographic involution. The overlap between these axioms creates what he describes as 'the smug . . . distancing of Victorian values in recent cinema, the continued borrowing from nineteenth-century narrative technique, and the sometimes emphatic fit between the period's own media advances and their fulfilment in contemporary film narrative'.³¹ Although I am, in this article, not primarily concerned with either generic or the photographic inheritance, Stewart's point about the cultural distancing which is experienced in relation to the Victorian age is compelling. Thus, there is a noticeable 'push' and 'pull' in the representation of the Victorian period, which arises from on the one hand a belief in the Victorian as the 'anti-romantic', a period associated with pruderies and 'buttoned-up' attitudes, known for its industriousness rather than its romanticism, against which the present can define itself as modern, and on the other hand a kind of nostalgia, a yearning for origin (of modernity).³² This has also been noted by Pidduck, who, in relation to the costume film, points out that 'these films return again and again to mythical points of origin for Anglo-American culture: the Victorian era as a period of sexual and social repression'.³³

Tellingly, Victorian interiors are often associated with clutter and a kind of claustrophobia that is matched by a cultural understanding of the Victorian age. The Regency, perhaps through association with Jane Austen's novels, but also as an idealized pre-industrial, pre-modern era,



Figure 4
A cluttered background
separating Young Jolyon and his
wife in episode 2 of *The Forsyte
Saga* (1967).

34 See *Radio Times* features on *Middlemarch*, *Tipping the Velvet* or *The Way We Live Now*, which all emphasize the transformation of locations into the 'real' past.

35 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 61.

36 Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 29.

is often represented in a much more stylish way that is supported by the more spacious and airy architecture of the period. This allows the ITV drama a visual representation of the Victorian age that at the same time escapes some of the claustrophobia of Victorian domestic spaces. However, although arguably not more or less authentic than its predecessor, the discussion around the ITV *Forsyte Saga* also indicates a preoccupation with the notion of the 'authentic' that, as numerous *Radio Times* articles on the transformation of settings into 'real' period locations show, is specific to more recent period drama.³⁴ What is emphasized is always the striving towards an authenticity that is necessarily constructed. To address this further, I want to return here to the notion of the viewer as explorer of the past.

The opening of the ITV *Forsyte Saga* resembles the entry into a doll's house. The house, seen from the outside, seems perfect, with inviting light shining through the windows into the darkness of the night. It is a haven, safe and self-contained. Susan Stewart addresses the allure of the dollhouse and the secrets it harbours:

Transcendence and the interiority of history and narrative are the dominant characteristics of the most consummate of miniatures – the dollhouse. A house within a house, the dollhouse not only presents the house's articulation of the tension between inner and outer spheres, of exteriority and interiority – it also represents the tension between two modes of interiority. Occupying a space within an enclosed space, the dollhouse's aptest analogy is the locket or the secret recesses of the heart: center within center, within within within. The dollhouse is a materialized secret; what we look for is the dollhouse within the dollhouse and its promise of an infinitely profound interiority.³⁵

Indeed, our entry into the house is directly into an inner sanctum, into the privacy of the nursery, bypassing the more public and representative rooms of the house. The space that is discovered is one of longing and nostalgia, but also of secrets. It is here that the forbidden love between Young Jolyon and Helene blossoms. The longing that marks their romance is made visual by the soft glow of the candle, which creates an enchanted atmosphere, cosy, private and alluring, but that also obscures the detail of the room, emphasizing its private character. The conveyed privacy of the room and its simplicity are directly related to the intimacy of the setting. As Bachelard notes, it is in the simple rather than the ornate and elaborately displayed, that we find intimacy: 'We must first look for centers of simplicity in houses with many rooms. For as Baudelaire said, in a palace, "there is no place for intimacy".'³⁶

The entry into the house is thus not only an entry into the past but an entry into what is kept private, secret and hidden, both narratively and spatially. Rooms and houses, in the ITV adaptation, seem to be deliberately chosen spaces used to depict a version of the past that is, even though not necessarily more authentic, more interested in a particular type of authenticity.

A closer look at the opening sequence of the serial illustrates this claim further; rather than through the front door, the space is entered through a window. This opening sets the tone for the adaptation. While the viewer in the BBC drama was an invited viewer, addressed and encouraged by the voiceover narration to take a look at the past and at this particular family, to observe and to learn, the audience's gaze here is almost voyeuristic, entering the private space, observing but unobserved. This sense of the discovery of secrets is underlined by the device of the anonymous voiceover during the dinner held in honour of Winifred Forsyte's and Montague Dartie's engagement. Unlike with Young Jolyon's voiceover in the BBC serial, the sparing use of voiceover here and elsewhere, is not directed at the audience but rather gives the impression of accidentally 'overheard' conversation fragments. There is a sense of the viewer being present yet unacknowledged and unnoticed.

What are the implications of such an approach to the past? The discovery here seems to be of a secret, private, past; not the past of history books but the life of 'real' people, not meant to be observed, and because of that supposedly more 'true' or 'authentic' than what is on public display. It is this search for the 'real' that motivates the drive towards authenticity in the classic novel adaptation. The effect is reminiscent of reality television and creates a link between the classic novel adaptation as a bastion of 'quality' and more popular television genres. What is enforced is a sense of the 'real' as the ordinary, as the intimate and private made public.

There is also something very intimate about the viewing of this past on television. I am here again reminded of Stewart's analogy of the dollhouse as embodying the hidden and the secret, the infinitely intimate. Stewart sees the dollhouse as the representation of the tension between exteriority and interiority and, moreover, through its nature as miniature, it also 'represents the tension between two modes of interiority'.³⁷ Watching period drama on television is an exercise in interiority. Viewed in the privacy of the own home is a miniature of another home and another time.

With reference to how TV homes in 1950s America incorporated an illusion of outside spaces even within the domestic settings of family sitcoms, Spiegel notes:

It was not just that these domestic interiors imitated the popular architectural ideal; they also fulfilled expectations about television that were voiced in popular discourses of the time. That is, the depiction of domestic space appears to have been based in part upon those utopian predictions that promised that television would provide for its audiences a view of outside spaces.³⁸

In the case of period drama, the image does more than take the viewer on a journey to far-away places. Instead, the journey is a journey at once into the world and into the self. What is at stake here is a notion of selfhood that is constructed through and against the past as depicted on the screen,

³⁷ Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 61.

³⁸ Spiegel, *Make Room for TV*, p. 106.

a negotiation of the present and of the modern self as based on and juxtaposed with the Victorian. Identity becomes a negotiation of sameness and difference. I will illustrate this point with an example.

What seems to fascinate 1990s viewers about the past and the Victorian age as the age of the novel and the most often depicted period in the classic serial does not appear to be grand history or even narrative drive, but the life of ordinary people and the experience of life long ago. Caughie addresses this phenomenon when he refers to the pleasure derived from detail and performance.³⁹ This evident fascination with period setting and representation is manifested in programmes that aim to recreate the past by transplanting modern people into carefully recreated period environments in which they have to live for the space of several months. The format is familiar and suggests a strong link to the basic formula of reality television transferred onto a period setting. The challenge is to experience first-hand 'how the people in period drama live'. One such programme is *1900 House*. The emphasis, as with other programmes of this kind, is the attempt to construct the past as a personal and intimate history that can be experienced and lived. Thus, the booklet accompanying the series of *1900 House* reads as follows:

On 14 March 1999 an ordinary family embarked upon an extraordinary journey. Paul and Joyce Bowler with their children Kathryn, Ruth, Hilary and Joe were selected to travel back in time to the world of their great-grandparents. Their destination was a Victorian house. . . . The Bowlers' challenge was to live for three months as a Victorian family. We all know that life has changed radically over the past hundred years, but exactly how have those changes affected our everyday lives? We may be able to visualize Victorian life, but how does it feel?⁴⁰

Interestingly, this concern with self-discovery and the re-creation of an authentic nineteenth-century experience of domestic life is joined by a concern with the conversion of space: '[*1900 House*] also tells the story of the loving and painstaking conversion of two rundown flats into the Bowlers' Victorian home and places this unique experiment in its historical context'.⁴¹ Again, the perennial interest of British television with the (Victorian) past, its representation, and its relevance for the present, appears to be constructed around the principle of transformation so often utilized in lifestyle programming, but also present in the transformation of space into 'authentic' period surroundings in the classic serial. There is thus a link between lifestyle, home improvement, the experience of the past, and nineteenth-century domestic spaces.

Although the emphasis of the programme here is on both the journey into the past and the experience of ordinary life, it also clearly stresses the connection to both ancestry and the self. The return to the Victorian age is not merely an adventure; it is also an exercise in finding one's roots. Thus, tellingly, Joyce Bowler, upon returning to her normal, modern lifestyle, notes: 'It could have taken a lot of time and money in therapy to

39 Caughie, *Television Drama*, p. 213.

40 Mark McCrum and Matthew Sturgis, *1900 House* (Oxford: Past Times, 2000), book cover.

41 Ibid.

discover I'm OK with myself Instead it took three months living as a Victorian for me to recognize it'.⁴² The journey into the past becomes a journey into the self. The discovery is two-fold. It is a discovery of the past, not in the form of grand history, but the individual histories of ordinary people and, through the re-discovery of the ordinary and the domestic, also a discovery of the self in relation to this history. This discovery is achieved through domestic interiors and the experience of 'ordinary' life made strange. The use of history and the past in the *1900 House* puts both contestants and the audience in touch with private identity (through both conflict and contrast with the experienced difference of the past). However, through the evocation of history and of historical and cultural roots that form a connection to a kind of Victorian ancestry created by a sharing of the experience of period domesticity and the 'ordinary', the small detail of tools, kitchen utensils and everyday life at home, it is also a construction of a kind of national and historical identity, a public selfhood. The effect is thus simultaneously a sense of belonging, a selfhood that is defined in terms of national identity, and a sense of difference as individual selfhood. Quite appropriately perhaps, as Bryden and Floyd point out, this is also how the Victorians saw the home:

The home was imagined, in nineteenth-century domestic discourse, to provide a powerfully influential space for the development of character and identity. This 'domestic environmentalism' . . . depended on a conception of the domestic space as separate and on practises that were identified as profoundly different from those of the world 'outside' At the same time, the values and behaviour inculcated in the home were considered crucial for the formation and maintenance of national identity, a necessary protection against less predictable social and economic changes.⁴³

The home is associated with both grand history and the self; it represents the cradle for selfhood and nationhood, the private and the public. As such, it is both macrocosm and microcosm, conveyed directly into the heart of the home; television here is both window to the world and window to the self.

In a very similar way, there are moments in the ITV *Forsyte Saga* that forge a connection between past and present that goes beyond the appreciation of visual splendour and period interiors. Throughout the programme, intimacy is used as a device to foster a connection with the past that is in effect voyeuristic and that builds on comparable aims in programmes such as the *1900 House*. The impact of the entry into the 'inner sanctum' of the nursery at the beginning of the drama and our involvement as viewer/voyeur is underlined by the repeated use of deliberate breaches of privacy throughout the programme. Thus, for example a very different but equally private moment later on in the series is the scene when Irene, unbeknownst to Soames, douches to counter conception. Again, as with the nursery at the opening of the drama, the

⁴³ Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd, 'Introduction', in Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd (eds), *Domestic Space – Reading the 19th Century Interior* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 2.

44 Caughie, in *Television Drama*, notes a similar distancing and differentiating of the past in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (BBC, 1996), where a highly composed shot is used to situate the drama 'in a time, an ethos and a way of seeing. This precise location in time makes all the more shocking the theme of sexual and physical domestic abuse, giving us the same sense of horror which the novel gave to the Victorians, and, at the same time, historicizing domestic violence' (p. 218).

scene takes us to a private, hidden location – the bathroom. As before, the secrecy and privacy embodied in the scene that we witness are mirrored by the secrecy of this private domestic space. The starkness and minimalism of the way in which the scene is shot contrasts strongly with the lavishness of period décor in other scenes and distances even while it simultaneously underlines the sense of an almost unsettling intimacy and reality (figures 5–7).⁴⁴

The scene is a moment added by the ITV adaptation and not part of either Galsworthy's novels or the BBC adaptation. What is interesting here is the utilization of the detail of the douche as a device used to convey intimacy and recognition. Here, I would like to briefly return to Bachelard's notion of the miniature and the concept of the microcosm encapsulating a macrocosm. I suggest that the detail of private, intimate Victorian life is used as a gateway into the past. As the symbol of the private domestic space comes to represent a 'real' past of ordinary people, so the Victorian contraceptive method comes to serve a function larger than itself. While standing for what is outdated and awkward about the Victorian age in both the crudeness of the contraceptive device and the secrecy of its application, it simultaneously creates a bridge between the past and the present on a basic human level through a recognition of similar concerns. The device thus indirectly plays on a stereotype of the Victorian age as sexually repressed, prudish and secretive that mirrors the notion of the Victorian age constructed in the 1960s serial. However, unlike in the earlier adaptation, even though the scene shows Irene's unwillingness to submit to her role and thus addresses feminist concerns about women's roles in Victorian England, there is no strong sense of appeal to the audience to condemn the period. Instead, the emphasis is again on a sense of exploration, curiosity and a kind of fascination with the exoticism of the past. As with the concern with domestic detail in the *1900 House*, the position of the viewer is constructed as privileged in glimpsing what is construed as the 'secret life of the Victorians' in an effort to construct the viewer's own identity as both public and private, by at once distancing him/herself from the past and enabling a bond with it.

There are certainly substantial changes between the 1960s and the 1990s television environment and the analysis of the two adaptations of *The Forsyte Saga* has served to highlight some of those differences and their background in social as well as medium-specific and institutional

Figures 5–7
Irene Forsyte (Gina McKee) in the bathroom in the ITV *Forsyte Saga* (Dir. Christopher Menaul, David Moore and Andy Wilson; produced by Granada Television, WGBH Boston for ITV, 2002).



histories. I want to end this article with a few further thoughts on the classic serial and its display of the domestic.

In recent years, period drama has attracted criticism for its blend of nostalgia and visual pleasure, its perceived lack of social critique and the way in which it appears to blur boundaries between the then and now, denying formal distance and thus undermining the possibility of, for Fredric Jameson, 'the lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way'.⁴⁵ The recent *Forsyte Saga* with its lavish decor, emphasis on period authenticity and lack of any strong sense of social critique, could certainly be condemned in exactly those terms. Yet, is there not a certain kind of appropriateness in representing the past in this particular way?

The adaptation may obscure the class consciousness of Galsworthy's text and may foreground visual splendour as spectacle, but considering the great stock Victorians put in domesticity, the display of the home as a lavish and ornamental space seems befitting. Spiegel describes the late Victorian home as follows:

The suburban house of the late Victorian period took on an elaborate display function as domestic havens were infused with an increased emphasis on visual pleasures and bodily comforts that luxury goods promised to provide. Ornate finery . . . was a sign of wealth and good taste at afternoon tea parties and other social gatherings. Most of the houses were built around a central fireplace that was usually lavishly decorated with carved mantels upon which sculptures and other ornate bric-a-brac were placed. Here family members might convene for a night of relaxation, gazing at the burning logs and artfully arranged objects in the room.⁴⁶

The Victorian home was meant to be looked at and the longing for and pleasure in the lush luxury of domestic surroundings felt by the television audience is mirrored by how Victorians themselves felt about their homes. Moreover, programmes such as *Changing Rooms* (Bazal, 1997–), but also less design-orientated kinds of lifestyle programmes such as *How Clean Is Your House* (TalkBack, 2003–), indicate an interest in domestic interiors, in publicizing private space, that suggests that, in some ways, there is a continuing affinity with the drive to exhibit privacy, to celebrate the home as an extension of a public persona.

Maybe it is possible to take this even further. Our continued and renewed interest in the public celebration of the home brings our age and that displayed on television closer and suggests an affinity between the then and now that goes beyond narrative and an identification with characters, and instead is manifested in an identity that is constructed through and around the home and our understanding of this space. Thus, *The Forsyte Saga* moves constantly from the private of the nursery to the semi-public space of the dining room, from the Regency to the art deco of Robin Hill, from the intimate to grand display, both spatially and metaphorically. One could see this split as gendered. Schor's argument is particularly illuminating in the context of the search for alternative

⁴⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1996), p. xx.

⁴⁶ Spiegel, *Make Room for TV*, p. 17.

histories taking place here and the resulting gendering of period space in the ITV *Forsyte Saga*. In the series, as in the novels, there is a noticeable abandoning of grand history in favour of the discovery of the ordinary that translates into a discovery of the female space of the home.

Moreover, there is a further distinction within the domestic realm that corresponds to Schor's categories of the sublime and the everyday detail. Thus, domestic space, in the ITV drama, seems divided between the private and hidden realms of nurseries, bedrooms and bathrooms and the representative dining and drawing rooms of grand houses, which function as public spaces within the home. Together with what could be read as the ultimate 'sublime' space achieved with Robin Hill, the house Soames has designed by Bosinney, this forms a split between female, private spaces, neutral semi-public spaces, and male, architectural rather than domestic/furnished spaces.

Bachelard's study of domestic space and the house does not rely on gender as a structuring device of different spaces but rather connects interiors and selfhood in non-gendered ways. Instead of reading interiors as gendered social spaces, he understands their function as images that are lived, experienced and re-imagined. The home becomes the space for what he calls 'reverie', for daydreaming as a semi-conscious state that allows the self to return to memory and childhood. The house is thus not social trap but rather a momentary liberation from time and space. Bachelard's take on the space of the house and the discovered self as non-gendered is intriguing in relation to the representation of domestic spaces in the classic serial, yet perhaps not quite suitable. Domestic spaces and the home bear gender connotations, as do the pleasures of costume drama. Claire Monk has argued convincingly that period drama in the 1990s was often simply regarded as a manifestation of heritage culture rather than as woman's picture (or queer drama):

The gender-blindness of the dominant British critical approach to heritage cinema is sufficiently strange as to seem almost wilful, given the historical associations of femininity with a (culturally constructed) disposition towards the pleasures of the (popular and literary) novel, the costume film, female-centred narratives and 'female' genres such as romance and melodrama; and, last but not least, the pleasures of consumption.⁴⁷

These gender connotations are further underlined by the gendered nature of the move away from patriarchal versions of grand History towards histories that are lived and experienced, and the drive towards the discovery of alternative truths, which very often focuses on female subjectivities.⁴⁸ This is not only illustrated in period drama on television, but likewise transcends the medium and manifests itself in for example the so-called neo-Victorian novel, such as Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*, *Fingersmith* and *Affinity*, A. S. Byatt's *Possession* and *Angels and Insects*, and Charles Palliser's *The Quincunx*, which explore alternative

47 Claire Monk, 'The heritage film and gendered spectatorship', *Close Up: The Electronic Journal of British Cinema*, Issue 1 (Winter 1996–97), p. 4; Parts 1 and 2 (Part 1, <http://www.shu.ac.uk/services/lc/closeup/monk.htm>; Part 2, <http://www.shu.ac.uk/services/lc/closeup/monk2.htm>) and Claire Monk, 'The British "heritage film" and its critics', *Critical Survey*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1995).

48 Critics like Monk have highlighted the way in which the costume film can create identities which are fluid and heterogeneous, but as Richard Dyer notes in 'Nice young men who sell antiques: gay men in heritage cinema', in *Film/Literature/Heritage: A Sight and Sound Reader* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), pp. 43–8, the interest in alternative histories which I have addressed is also manifested in an often sympathetic attention to lesbian and gay characters and narratives in period drama.

⁴⁹ See Sarah Waters, *Tipping the Velvet* (London: Virago, 1998), *Affinity* (London: Virago, 2002), *Fingersmith* (London: Virago, 2002), Antonia S. Byatt, *Possession: A Romance* (London: Vintage, 1991), *Angels and Insects* (London: Vintage, 1995) and Charles Palliser, *The Quincunx: The Inheritance of John Huffam* (London: Penguin, 1992).

⁵⁰ See for example Higson, 'Representing the national past'; Wollen, 'Over our shoulders'; and Craig Cairns, 'Rooms without a view', *Sight and Sound* (June 1991), pp. 10–13.

⁵¹ Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, p. 124.

histories and subjectivities, not always, but often, through the domestic and through female spaces and subjectivities.⁴⁹

I also want to briefly re-address the issue of class-consciousness in this context. The omission or misrepresentation of class in period representation is at the heart of the critique of heritage cinema, which has often condemned the costume film as glossing over the class struggle and instead offering idealist images of Englishness as escapism from the horrors of modernity.⁵⁰ The length of this article has not permitted me to address this issue in more detail, but juxtaposing the two adaptations of *The Forsyte Saga* has highlighted differences in their tone and address. While the cultural and political climate in the 1960s encouraged a representation of the past which showed signs of class-awareness and critique, my analysis of the ITV adaptation, although highlighting an interest in alternative histories (such as female subjectivity), also indicated a tendency towards the displacement of this class awareness. However, as Pidduck points out in relation to the costume film, 'these films rarely offer an unproblematic affinity with the 'natural order', but commonly mediate belonging through outsiders'.⁵¹ Thus, even though the omission of any overt class conflict, paired with what is generally understood as period drama's middle-brow status and perceived middle-class audience, indicates a (national) identity that is equally middleclass, national and private identity and selfhood are always negotiated not only through a sense of belonging but also through its disruption. The ITV *Forsyte Saga* may not challenge existing class structures but neither does it encourage an unproblematic identification and sense of belonging. The perceived 'comfort-zone' of identification, in the process of the creation of selfhood, is also an alien place, is both familiar and unsettlingly different.

Through the investigation of interior spaces and the representation of domestic life, this article has introduced an approach to the analysis of television period drama that aims for an understanding of this type of programming within its own socio-political as well as medium-specific and institutional context. Referring to the specific located-ness of television as 'domestic object', I have worked with the notion of television as 'window to the world' and 'window to the self' to show that the ITV *Forsyte Saga* utilizes domestic space in two ways. Thus, the construction of identity is paired with a pleasure that is derived from the narrative of transformation, both within the narrative (Robin Hill) and extra-textually, through the knowledge of its transformation. This pleasure derives from design. At the same time, within this representation of the past are pockets of intimacy that construct the past through the private, the domestic and ordinary, and aid the formation of selfhood as both public and private. Authenticity, as a driving factor in the representation of the past in the classic serial, is related to this formation of selfhood through the desire to know the past as hidden 'truth', as an origin as 'real' place, against which the modern self can be defined and constructed. Identity is revealed as an exercise of positioning

and contextualization, as a re-negotiating of the self (both national and private) in relation to the past that relies on its representation as both familiar and alien.

Television may be a window to the world, but my analysis shows the journey is not only to far-away but also to long-ago places. In the British context, heavily influenced by an ideal of television as a public service rather than escapism, the expectation to be fulfilled is one of knowledge and education. The journey is still a journey of discovery; however, it poses the question of what kinds of discovery are made in the case of the classic novel adaptation. When narratives are, as is often the case with literary adaptations, familiar, discovery is achieved between the lines of the adaptation or on a visual level. The classic serial's emphasis on style and preoccupation with detail adds a visual dimension to the adaptation that is related to but not restricted by the narrative.

Screen

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cover illustration

Maggie Cheung in *Irma Vep* (Olivier Assayas, 1996). Zeitgeist Films, all rights reserved.

Temporality and queer consciousness in *The House of Mirth*

JIM ELLIS

Both cinema and *The House of Mirth* can be said to start with the same event: the arrival of a train at a station. On 28 December 1895, a date that has been mythologized as the birth of the movies, the Lumière brothers showed *L'Arrivée d'un train/Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* to a paying public in the Salon Indien of the Grand Café in Paris (figure 1).¹ Although it shared the programme with a number of other films, the train film garnered the most attention: it was, according to an oft-repeated account, a shocking, even traumatic experience for the spectators, who screamed, ducked and fled the theatre.² The film would subsequently be shown in one of the first American public film screenings of the Lumière Cinematograph at Keith's Theatre, Union Square in New York on 29 June 1896.³ There would be many such train films in the early days of the silent cinema.

Tom Gunning has shown that there is in fact no evidence for the much repeated story about the terror of the first-time cinema-goers in the face of the train, and it would appear that *Arrival of a Train* was not even among those films shown on 28 December.⁴ There is nonetheless something compelling about the story: a very early British film by R.W. Paul, *The Countryman and the Cinematograph* (1901), shows us the terrified reaction of a hick confronted with an onrushing train on the screen. The scene is repeated in other early films such as *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (Edwin S. Porter, 1902) and parodied much later in Jean-Luc Godard's *Les Carabiniers* (1963). However, while the early cinema-goers were not as credulous as the story would suggest, Gunning does show that a kind of induced terror was part of the showmanship of the early cinema of attractions and was in fact a large

- 1 For a representative (if not uncritical) version, see David O. Cook, *A History of Narrative Cinema*, 3rd edn (New York, NY: Norton, 1996), pp. 10–11.
- 2 Tom Gunning, 'An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in)credulous spectator', *Art & Text*, vol. 34 (1989), pp. 31–45.
- 3 Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990), pp. 137–8.
- 4 Alan Williams, *Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 27.

5 Gunning, 'Aesthetic of astonishment', p. 41.

part of its appeal, much like the rides at the newly emerging amusement parks. He argues that this pleasure 'responds to the specifics of modern and especially urban life, what Benjamin and Kracauer understood as the drying up of experience and its replacement by a culture of distraction'.⁵ The story of the arrival of the train and the arrival of cinema is more compelling because it is not true, which probably means it speaks more directly about the dynamics of the original encounter. We may well wonder what it is about this particular story that makes it so compelling for an originary narrative about the appearance of the cinema, or for what Gunning suggests is cinema's primal scene, and the way that this primal scene connects trains, cinema and trauma.

The opening shot of Terence Davies's adaptation of *The House of Mirth* (2000) conjures up a similar set of connections. Lily Bart (Gillian

Figure 1
L'Arrivée d'un train/Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat (Lumière, 1895).



Figure 2
Lily Bart (Gillian Anderson)
in *The House of Mirth*
(Terence Davies, 2000).



Anderson) emerges out of the darkness through a cloud of steam and walks up a train platform directly towards the camera, backlighting making her appear largely as a silhouette (figure 2). The only other visual element is the looming, black train engine that dominates the shot. A title reads 'New York 1905', which means that Lily arrives less than ten years after (and about twenty blocks north of) the first American screening of *Arrival of a Train*. The shot, at least according to the dialogue that follows, does not immediately make sense: Lily tells Selden (Eric Stoltz) that she has just missed a train, not arrived on one: 'I've missed the three-fifteen to Rhinebeck and there isn't another train 'til half past five'. (The novel, however, explains that 'she had come up to town from Tuxedo, on her way to the Gus Trenors' at Bellomont, and had missed the three-fifteen train'.⁶) Moreover, the shot is an addition to the novel, which starts from Selden's point of view: 'Selden paused in surprise. In the afternoon rush of the Grand Central Station his eyes had been refreshed by the sight of Miss Lily Bart.'⁷ In the film, this becomes the third shot. After the one on the platform and another of Lily theatrically framed in silhouette in a doorway, entering the central area of the station, we finally have a close shot of a cluster of parasols that passes to reveal Selden, looking at Lily. But while it might be slightly incongruous in terms of the film's dialogue, outside of the film's narrative the opening shot that pairs Lily with the train makes a great deal of sense, echoing cinema's primal scene as well as a number of other similar shots in the history of cinema that link women and trains.⁸ Lily emerges not out of the past, in other words, but out of cinema history. The shot might thus be taken to suggest that the film is not going to be primarily engaged with the past, but rather with how the past has been remembered, especially via the cinema and the particular role that cinema plays in cultural memory.

A number of scholars have noted the apparent affinity of cinema and trains, and their twinning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century imagination as signifiers of modernity. Indeed, Lynne Kirby argues in her recent study of the railroad and silent cinema that 'The railroad should be seen as an important *protocinematic* phenomenon'.⁹ Both cinema and the train were seen to inaugurate a new experience of space and temporality, one founded on a separation of the subject from the world observed. Wolfgang Schivelbusch writes that a new mode of vision was associated with the experience of train travel: 'Panoramic perception, in contrast to traditional perception, no longer belonged to the same space as the perceived objects: the traveler saw the objects, landscapes, etc. *through* the apparatus which moved him through the world'.¹⁰ Giuliana Bruno further observes that 'In a movie theatre, as in a train, one is alone with others, traveling in time and space, viewing panoramically from a still, sitting position through a framed image in motion'.¹¹ These two modes of traveling perception came together in the very popular early genre of the phantom ride, where a camera was mounted on the front or side of a train, so that the cinema audience in a

6 Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (New York, NY: Random House, 1999), p. 4.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

8 Critics have cited such precedents as *Anna Karenina* (Clarence Brown, 1935), *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophüls, 1948) and *Some Like it Hot* (Billy Wilder, 1959). See Kevin Jackson, 'House of Mirth', *Sight and Sound* (November 2000), p. 54; Julianne Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film: Space, Place and the Past* (London: BFI, 2004), p. 2; Wendy Everett, *Terence Davies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 158–9.

9 Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 2.

10 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), p. 64.

11 Giuliana Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Culture Theory and the City in the Films of Elvira Notari* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 50.

sense became the train, vicariously enjoying this new experience of space and motion. The pleasure of this combination lives on, of course, in the tracking shot, which similarly combines the camera and movement, occasionally on rails. Indeed, given this history, we might see it as the quintessential cinematic shot, because of the way the tracking shot reproduces the primary elements of the originary moment of a new visuality and a new spatial regime. As we shall see below, the long tracking shot is one of Terence Davies's favorite and most characteristic formal devices, one that is for him almost always connected with the movement of consciousness or memory.

On a more prosaic level, both cinema and trains were greeted with some suspicion, often on similar grounds: in particular, the dangerous potential for the mixing of the classes and the threat to unaccompanied women. The perception of both as 'bad influences and places of license or danger with respect to female sexuality'¹² is to some degree exemplified by Lily Bart's conversation in the train station with Selden about visiting his apartment, where she concludes with the statement: 'Why not? . . . I'll take the risk'.¹³ In taking the risk, Lily sets in motion her social descent, ending up, appropriately enough, in what would be in the early days of film one of the most remarked-upon segments of the cinema audience: the urban, single, working female.¹⁴

The House of Mirth tells the story of Lily Bart, a beautiful and adept socialite who is financially dependent upon her rich aunt and her society friends while she pursues the only career she believes available to her, marriage to a rich man. Edith Wharton set the novel in her present-day New York of 1905 (where Davies also plays it), following Lily as she sabotages her own near-successful attempts at securing a husband, either because of her love for Lawrence Selden (unsuitable due to insufficient funds) or because of her own integrity. Accused by the evil Bertha Dorset (Laura Linney) of having improper relations with her husband, Lily is shunned by society and loses her inheritance. This precipitates her descent down the social ladder, which ends with her working in a milliner's shop and getting fired for incompetence. Despite having the means to blackmail Bertha into helping her back into society, Lily refuses to compromise her dearly bought integrity, and dies of a perhaps accidental overdose of chloral.

The novel was published less than ten years after the birth of the cinema, in the same year, 1905, that the Nickleodeon made its appearance across America. It would be another ten years before the arrival of a fully developed narrative cinema, with the appearance of D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, based on another 1905 bestseller, Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman*. A scant three years after that, in 1918 *The House of Mirth* would itself be made into a six-reeler by Metro Pictures Corporation, the first of Wharton's novels to be filmed (the film featured a happy ending). Films of *The Glimpses of the Moon* (1922) and *The Age of Innocence* (1920) followed soon after, in 1923 and 1924 respectively.¹⁵

12 Kirby, *Parallel Tracks*, p. 9.

13 Wharton, *House of Mirth*, p. 6.

14 See, in particular, Siegfried Kracauer's 1927 essay, 'The Little Shoppgirls go to the Movies', in Thomas Y. Levin (ed. and trans.), *The Mass Ornament and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

15 Scott Marshall, 'Edith Wharton on film and television: a history and filmography', *Edith Wharton Review*, vol. 13 (1996), pp. 15–26; Linda Costanzo Cahir, 'Wharton and the age of film', in Carol J. Singley (ed.), *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 211–28.

16 Quoted in Kaja Silverman, 'The dream of the nineteenth century', *Camera Obscura*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2002), p. 3.

What I want to look at in this essay are the strange temporalities of cinema, and the peculiar relation of cinema and history that is alluded to in Jean-Luc Godard's comment that 'The cinema is a nineteenth-century matter that was resolved in the twentieth century'.¹⁶ One place in particular where we can observe this delayed effect is in Lily Bart's essentially cinematic imagination. Her way of experiencing the world is the product of a dislocation that, while essentially predating narrative cinema, is nonetheless representative of a certain experience of modernity and one for which both cinema and trains provided a potent metaphor. This experience produces a consciousness that will later be seen as quintessentially queer. Indeed, following Foucault, we might say the same thing of homosexuality that Godard says of cinema: that it is a nineteenth century matter that was resolved in the twentieth. What I will argue, in this essay, is that it is the filmic adaptation of the novel that makes this knowledge available to us, or, in Godard's phrasing, resolves it. At least in this particular case, the period film can function as what Freud calls *Nachträglichkeit* or deferred action, a bringing to consciousness and a making sense of some earlier traumatic experience: in this case, the trauma of modernity that gives birth to a version of the queer subject.

Before going further, I should register a caveat. In spite of the fact that a number of her novels were filmed during her lifetime, it would appear that Wharton only ever visited a movie theatre once.¹⁷ Wharton seems to have loved everything about the modern world except modernism and the cinema. While she adored typewriters, telephones and automobiles, she hated the novels of James Joyce and thought that film was a debased art form. Indeed, in a couple of her late novels, *Twilight Sleep* (1927) and *The Children* (1928), cinema figures as one of the evils of the modern age. However, in spite of Wharton's distaste and the novel's positioning very early in the history of cinema, both it and its central protagonist are in fact aware of the cinema, as we see in a passage that links trains, cinema and Lily's visual imagination:

The Van Osburgh marriage was celebrated in the village church near the paternal estate on the Hudson. It was the 'simple country wedding' to which guests are conveyed in special trains, and from which the hordes of uninvited have to be fended off by the intervention of the police. While these sylvan rites were taking place, in a church packed with fashion and festooned with orchids, the representatives of the press were threading their way, notebook in hand, through the labyrinth of wedding presents, and the agent of a cinematograph syndicate was setting up his apparatus at the church door. It was the kind of scene in which Lily had often pictured herself as taking the principal part, and on this occasion the fact that she was merely a casual spectator, instead of the mystically veiled figure occupying the centre of attention, strengthened her resolve to assume the latter part before the year was over.¹⁸

17 Marshall, 'Edith Wharton on film', p. 15. Her biographer suggests a lower number: 'Edith Wharton herself appears never to have entered a movie theatre'; R. W. B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton: A Biography* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 7.

18 Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 86.

19 The cinematograph syndicate would likely either have been Biograph or Edison. Both of these companies specialized in 'Actualities', films of American celebrities, events or landscapes, in order to compete with the more dominant French companies: Lumières, Méliès and Pathé Frères. One of the most successful of the early actualities, *President McKinley at Home* (Biograph, 1902) is a representative example of the sort of film that is being filmed at the Van Osburgh wedding.

20 Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 229.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 220.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

The quotation marks around 'simple country wedding' and the fans that have to be held back serve to indicate the theatricality of the spectacle. Even if a camera were not there, the fact that the guests are conveyed in special trains might be enough to suggest that the experience here is a cinematic one: the cinema is, in a sense, a special train. But a movie camera is there, and what is significant is the way the camera's view is linked to Lily's desire.¹⁹ She imagines herself as an actress in a scene, 'taking the principal part,' being filmed from a particular perspective, for an audience. The camera thus figures but also facilitates a certain separation within Lily, a distance from a performed self that she watches from a remove. This is analogous to the division within her between the proper desire of marriage, for which she has been raised, and an improper or perverse desire for independence. This self-division occasionally results in an unreadability that puzzles the more conventional characters ('All I can say is, Lily, that I can't make you out!' says Judy Trenor at Bellomont, after Lily sabotages her own chances with Percy Grice) and which ultimately will leave her 'publicly branded as the heroine of a "queer" episode'.²⁰ It is, arguably, the cinematic consciousness that gives birth to the queerness. But it is only the film that can make sense of that term for us.

In the novel, Lily's queerness ultimately has to do with her tenuous relation to the class into which she was born, a tenuousness that results from the conjunction of factors such as her lack of immediate family, her uncertain economic means, her unmarried status and her lack of marketable skills. What really makes her queer, however, is her knowledge of herself as a commodity within a world of luxury goods. This insight gives her a commitment to aesthetics (and in particular an aesthetics of being) that looks at times like frivolity, but under which lies both an ethical and philosophical critique: 'If I could only do over my aunt's drawing room I know I should be a better woman', she remarks to Selden early in the film, in the context of a discussion of gender and economics. More importantly, her knowledge of her status as commodity has impressed upon her the gravity and the consequences of skillful self-performance. Her aesthetic sense and her appreciation of the niceties of social performance, however, balance this with a lightness of expression that resembles a camp wit.

The self-consciousness we see in Lily at the Van Osburgh wedding is not an isolated moment in the novel, where we frequently see her considering how best to display herself and the effects of that display. Late in the novel she explains, 'I'm not of the tearful order. I discovered early that crying makes my nose red, and the knowledge has helped me through several painful episodes.'²¹ More than once she presents herself as a person playing the role of Miss Bart: 'It was as she had said to Selden – people were tired of her. They would welcome her in a new character, but as Miss Bart they knew her by heart. She knew herself by heart too, and was sick of the old story.'²² Here, it is as if, like Shakespeare's Cleopatra, Lily knows she will someday be played by

23 Ibid., pp. 315–16.

24 Giuliana Bruno includes the tableau vivant in her survey of pre-cinematic modes of visuality in *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 149.

25 Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 133.

26 Ibid.

Anderson, herself the star of a long-running serial, *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993–2002). Even in the depths of her decline she perversely takes pleasure in the spectacle of herself, at this point as the heroine of a melodrama: ‘If only life could end now – end on this tragic yet sweet vision of lost possibilities, which gave her a sense of kinship with all the loving and forgoing in the world’.²³ What is important to notice is the emergence in Lily of the peculiar consciousness associated with the new visual regime of modernity, one that involves a sense of separation from the self, and staging or perceiving the self as a visual object.

The most conspicuous moment of this self-display is the tableaux vivants scene. The tableau vivant was a popular eighteenth and nineteenth century amusement, where famous paintings or scenes would be recreated by living persons, in what might be seen as a forerunner to the costume drama.²⁴ In the novel, Lily appears in the reproduction of a painting at the Bry’s party, which results in a triumph for her:

Here there could be no mistaking the predominance of personality – the unanimous ‘Oh!’ of the spectators was a tribute, not to the brushwork of Reynolds’s ‘Mrs. Lloyd’ but to the flesh and blood loveliness of Lily Bart. She had shown her artistic intelligence in selecting a type so like her own that she could embody the person represented without ceasing to be herself.²⁵

Whereas most of the women taking part recreate fairly spectacular paintings by artists such as Veronese or Titian, Lily decides instead on Joshua Reynolds’s more contemporary society portrait of Mrs Lloyd (1775–6). The difference between Lily’s performance and that of the other women is essentially the difference between cinematic modes of presentation and theatrical modes. The relation between Lily Bart and the character she plays, Mrs Lloyd, is precisely that which we expect from a film actor, and in particular the Hollywood star. An actor on stage preserves a distance between the role and the self, often using that distance to comment on the role and the role in turn serves as a kind of mask, with a kind of independence from the actor. By contrast, a film actor, like Lily in this instance, ‘embod[ies] the person represented without ceasing to be herself’, and the success of the performance is often the degree to which her imagined public personality – whether that of Lily Bart or Gillian Anderson – incorporates or coincides with, rather than presents, the role.

Acting is, of course, Lily’s great talent, her very conscious construction and performance of self, which is perhaps why Selden believes he glimpses at this moment the truest picture of her. He is struck by the performance: ‘The noble buoyancy of her attitude, its suggestion of soaring grace, revealed the touch of poetry in her beauty that Selden always felt in her presence, yet lost the sense of when he was not with her. Its expression was now so vivid that for the first time he seemed to see before him the real Lily Bart.’²⁶ In the film, Grace Stepney observes more tellingly that the dress she wears ‘makes her look like the real Lily,

the Lily I know' which highlights Lily's self-division: her most accomplished performance is to look like herself, or what the beholder imagines her to be. Selden replies to Grace in terms that are again reminiscent of a film actress: 'She has it in her to become whatever she is believed to be. We must think the best of her.' The self-consciousness that makes her such a successful performer is also, of course, her downfall; the critical distance she maintains from this chosen role and performed self is what causes her to hesitate at the wrong moments.

In the film, Davies changes the tableau scene quite spectacularly. Rather than inhabiting the figure of Mrs Lloyd, Davies puts her instead into Watteau's allegorical painting of summer. The curtain pulls back to reveal a Lily sitting in a loose-fitting, toga-like dress, with a crown of flowers in her hair and a sheaf of wheat at her elbow. As Graham Fuller points out, the painting has an allegorical appropriateness: Lily's summer is rapidly coming to an end, which is perhaps emphasized by the outsized sickle she holds.²⁷ The effect of changing the painting, however, is that the relation between actor and painting has shifted. It had to shift anyway, of course, since we now have three levels in play rather than two: Anderson playing Bart, playing the subject of the painting. Appropriately enough, Anderson as Bart has a knowing look on her face that echoes Lily's self-consciousness.

But we might also think about how Davies is insisting on the distance between the allegorical figure and the body of the person impersonating it, which is congruent with his approach to the past in general. Rather than attempt to smooth out the distance between Gillian Anderson and Lily Bart in the film, Davies chooses to accentuate it, much as we see Lily Bart (or Anderson) distancing herself from the allegorical role of Summer. This accentuation of distance is most apparent in the dialogue, which for the most part is faithfully reproduced from the novel. None of it sounds natural on the lips of Anderson or Eric Stoltz, which is appropriate for several reasons: it highlights both Lily's self-consciousness and also the theatricality of the society that Wharton was criticizing. More importantly, however, it highlights the gap or the ill fit between late-twentieth-century bodies and turn of the century speech. The slightly mannered acting style was highly criticized by a number of notable US film critics, who read it as a deficiency of acting ability rather than an aesthetic choice, which echoes early criticisms of the novel that could not decide whether it was social realism or mannered satire.²⁸ The debate over the acting is linked to a key concern with period films in general: the kind of access to or identification with the past that they allow or encourage. Behind this, of course, is a larger concern with the ability of film to convey historical knowledge, by which we often mean historical difference.

This question often surfaces in connection with the possibility or desirability of visual authenticity in period films: the extent to which one gets the look of the period right and, in particular, the way the objects of the past are photographed. Critics of the period film, such as Andrew

²⁷ Graham Fuller, 'Summer's end', *Film Comment*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2001), p. 54.

²⁸ See, for example, Stephen Holden's review in the *New York Times*, 23 September 2000; or Stanley Kauffmann's savage dismissal of the film in 'Women in danger', *The New Republic*, vol. 224, no. 3 (1 May 2001), p. 20. On the contemporary response to the novel, see Lewis, *Edith Wharton*, pp. 150–6.

29 The classic statement of this position is Andrew Higson's 'Re-presenting the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film', in Lester Friedman (ed.), *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 178–93.

30 Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 179.

31 Christopher Hobbs, quoted in Pat Kirkham and Mike O'Shaughnessy, 'Designing desire', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 2 (1992), p. 14.

32 Claudia L. Johnson, 'There's blood on the walls', *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 October 2000, pp. 18–19.

Higson, object that visual authenticity is the enemy of historical difference; the meaning of period objects fundamentally changes on film, where antique cars become signifiers of quaintness instead of avatars of modernity.²⁹ Objects and actors are thus overwritten or reinscribed, their 'original' meaning lost. The period film becomes something of a heritage museum, as in, for example, Scorsese's adaptation of *The Age of Innocence* (1993), where the camera is forever showing us the lost beauties of the past (although to be fair to the film, the novel was itself a historical fiction, a tale of old New York). The voiceover narration in *The Age of Innocence* functions in much the same way as the present-day frame narratives of *Chariots of Fire* (Hugh Hudson, 1981) or *Another Country* (Marek Kanievski, 1984), which work to bring us back to a pure experience of the past, rather than to encourage us to see the ways in which the past has been retrospectively constructed in the present.

In the period film, as on a train ride, the foreground becomes blurred and all objects at a distance become representations of themselves, estranged from their original being and experienced at a remove. There is, however, an appropriateness to this in the adaptation of *The House of Mirth*, since the novel itself imagines the vacuity of society as a kind of costume film *avant la lettre*, as we see in Selden's reaction to the society crowd at Monte Carlo: 'Their appearance confirmed the impression that the show had been staged regardless of expense, and emphasized its resemblance to one of those "costume-plays" in which the protagonists walk through the passions without displacing a drapery.'³⁰ The novel thus to some degree anticipates its own adaptation as period film, even before the idea of literary adaptation exists. Selden's sense of the loss of being involved in the costume drama of society is precisely analogous to the loss of meaning inscribed in the costume film, which Davies uses to his advantage.

This is not the first film by Davies set in the past. He established his reputation with a series of spare, elliptical, non-narrative films about his 1950s working-class Liverpool childhood: *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* (1988) and *The Long Day Closes* (1992). In those films, the designer Christopher Hobbs strove for what he called 'memory realism', attempting to reproduce the way these streets and houses might figure in the memory of the adult who had grown up among them.³¹ One critic observes that Davies's films feature 'a formal, even mannered quality of dialogue that represents not how conversations happen but how they might be remembered and re-remembered'.³² The dresses, magazines and other physical objects of the past are there not so much for period authenticity but rather because they were the material props of fantasy of this particular childhood. They are therefore crucial to the particular psychic landscape being revisited, of which the films are attempting to make sense retroactively. The soundtrack becomes particularly important, with songs frequently serving both as points of articulation between memories and as the rich carriers of emotion. The films themselves mimic the structure of memory by offering fragmentary

33 Phil Powrie, 'On the threshold between past and present: "alternative heritage"', in Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (eds), *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 321.

scenes connected by an associative logic rather than narrative progression.

One characteristic formal feature of Davies's films is particularly worth remarking: the use of the long tracking shot. Phil Powrie notes the significance of these shots in the Liverpool films, drawing attention to a couple of examples 'where apparently real-time camera-work is contradicted by temporal ellipses in the narrative events which occur'.³³ In Davies's films, argues Powrie, the tracking shot frequently traverses a threshold between inside and outside, and past and present. We might also note that the tracking shot frequently accompanies moments of emotional distress. In the case of a fight between a husband and wife in the pub in *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, for example, the argument continues on the soundtrack while the tracking shot drifts away, suggesting an emotional disengagement from a painful scene. In *The House of Mirth*, a similar gesture is repeated a couple of times towards the end of the film, as the camera moves away from an exhausted Lily lying on her bed, slowly tracking towards the window, as if looking elsewhere for signs of hope.

More often, however, the tracking shot is used to clarify things that the protagonists do not yet understand, but later may. While the films recount events in the past, there is a clear sense in which the films themselves take place in the present. That is, the camera (and thus the audience) understands events from the perspective of the present, enacting and requiring of its audience a double vision that can hold separate or distinguish the characters' understanding and that of the camera. The film can make sense of, in a way that twelve-year-old Bud cannot, not just Bud's fascination with the shirtless labourer working nearby, but also his identification with Debbie Reynolds in *Tammy*, or, more abstractly, with Nat King Cole's version of 'Starlight'. The flamboyant overhead tracking shot in *The Long Day Closes* that links church, school and cinema performs a retrospective analysis of the world that Bud inhabited, and the key ideological institutions that manufactured its reality. These are all things that Bud might later understand, but only after the arrival of adult sexuality, which in Davies's Liverpool films is generally figured as traumatic.

The tracking shot is usually readable in the Liverpool films as mimicking the action of memory and the retrospective understanding of an adult in the present, which makes sense given the films' autobiographical nature, but it is interesting to note that an ostentatious tracking shot (actually a series of tracking shots, connected with lap dissolves) also marks a major turning point in *The House of Mirth*. It starts with Lily in her aunt's house in New York, where she has just decided to join the Dorsets on their Mediterranean cruise. This decision will have fatal consequences, including Lily's expulsion from the house in which she stands. The sequence acts at least initially as something of a leave-taking, although neither Lily nor the viewer has any way of knowing this. The camera moves through abandoned rooms filled with

shrouded furniture, moves outside to look back at the house in the rain, travels down the lawn to a stream and then follows the stream's current. This seamlessly dissolves into a shot that moves swiftly across the golden water of the Mediterranean following the prow of the yacht, before finally ending by looking up at Monte Carlo.

We might compare this sequence to the much-remarked-upon Steadicam shot in Scorsese's *Age of Innocence*, where the camera accompanies Newland Archer to the party at Julius Beaufort's, moves through various salons, glances at a few paintings, and glides through the ballroom. While both act as point of view shots, in *The Age of Innocence* the camera figures as an interested visitor to the party, looking around curiously at the guests and the furnishings. In *The House of Mirth*, by contrast, the traveling shot evokes the movement of a mind and its emotions, rather than the movement of a physical body. Moreover, the point of view, as in Davies's other films, is clearly a retrospective one, which is signaled by temporal disjunctions within the shot: while it appears to take place in real time, it substitutes for what is a journey of days or even weeks. The shot, then, does not return us to the past or attempt to give us the experience of the past, as in *The Age of Innocence*, but rather it follows the contours of the present memory of the past.

The approach to the past in Davies's work does not fall into either of the two major schools of thinking about the period film. One side argues that film can offer us access to the past and a kind of historical knowledge. The other argues that the principle knowledge historical films offer us is insight into the present: historical films project present anxieties into the past, where they can be more easily dealt with. Two critics of Davies have discussed how his films move beyond the heritage film genre. Powrie suggests that Davies's Liverpool films combine aspects of both the heritage film and the bio-pic, resulting in an 'alternative heritage' genre that engages with the national past, but does so within the context of a coming-of-age narrative.³⁴ Belén Vidal Villaur suggests that *The House of Mirth* should be considered as a part of a group of post-heritage, literary films that are marked by their self-conscious engagements with the material.³⁵ Both of these are certainly productive approaches to the films in question. Taken together, they prompt us to see that there is a way in which Davies is interested in a self-conscious exploration of our memory of the past (whether personal or encoded in literature or cinema) and how the meaning of this memory may have shifted or become available in different ways. We might return here to the Freudian concept of deferred action, a process by which, say Laplanche and Pontalis,

experiences, impressions and memory-traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development. They may in that event be endowed not only with a new meaning but also with psychical effectiveness.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Belén Vidal Villaur, 'Classic adaptations, modern reinventions: reading the image in the contemporary literary film', *Screen*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2002), pp. 5–18.

³⁶ J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (New York, NY: Norton, 1973), p. 111.

Davies's films attempt to assemble and bring to consciousness the meaning of past events, generally traumatic events, the significance of which was not fully understood, or 'whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context'.³⁷ This assembling into a meaningful context is done in light of subsequent knowledge, which in the Freudian scheme, is most often sexual. In the Liverpool films, this deferred action has to do with knowledge of the self; in *The House of Mirth* it has to do with broader cultural developments.

For Davies the cinema is not just the best means of making this knowledge available to us: it is also, centrally, part of that knowledge. As the early films establish, cinema is a particular way of viewing the world; for Davies, it offers the best representation of one version of a queer consciousness. In *The Long Day Closes*, it is clear that the twelve-year old protagonist Bud is in the process of coming-to-consciousness about his homosexuality and what that will mean. The camera frequently frames him looking out of windows, sitting in precisely the same posture as when we see him leaning on the edge of the balcony of the cinema. The repetition suggests that Bud experiences the world around him as if it were a film. His distance from it and from his own performed self gives him an insight into the fragility of this collectively maintained illusion; the queer subject, this film suggests, is marked by a melancholy awareness that the world around the self is sustained only through collective belief. The performance of the self comes to assume a certain gravity under these conditions; a performance that comes to be marked by both a pained self-consciousness and an awareness of a founding gap both within the self and also between the self and the world.

This particular relation to the world is once again evoked in the framing structure of *The Neon Bible* (1995), Davies's adaptation of John Kennedy Toole's coming-of-age novel. As with *The House of Mirth*, the first shot is of an old-fashioned train. The entire film is structured as a series of memories, as a young man (David, played by Jacob Tierney) rides a train through the night. In the window of the train we see David's reflection, figuring his self-division and self-consciousness, and the window serves as the screen on which his memories are played out. Although this is Davies's first non-autobiographical film, we do see a familiar scenario relocated to the American South, of an alienated youth, a put-upon mother and a violent father. While it is never specified in the novel or the film, the youth's nascent homosexuality is clearly signaled, not least by his devotion to the glamorous if sexually suspect Aunt Mae (Gena Rowlands), who has made her living singing in bars. This sense of his sexuality as not-yet-understood is further strengthened by David's painfully fumbling and unsuccessful courtship of Jo Lynne, clearly based more on wish than desire. While he does not understand the implications of these events as they happen, the film implies that later he will, alone in the dark, watching details of his life reassembled and replayed on the train-window movie screen.

As the glamorous woman with a past who makes an uneasy return to the family fold, Aunt Mae can be seen in relation to Countess Olenska of *The Age of Innocence*. Countess Olenska, in turn, can be seen as a more mature and slightly less melodramatic version of Lily Bart. The three share a number of characteristics. They are dangerously mobile, morally ambiguous and economically imperiled. In the case of the two Wharton heroines, they function for the male protagonists – Newland Archer and Lawrence Selden – as the seductive alternative to a staid and conformist life. They represent the pleasures and perils of the modern world unrestrained by the comfortable traditions of the past. The tenuous relation of all three heroines to the family and to respectability threatens to put them in a lineage that also includes many of the heroines of the 1940s and 1950s Hollywood melodramas that Davies's young protagonists avidly consume; Davies acknowledges the influence of this tradition on the film, in particular *Letter from an Unknown Woman*.³⁸

³⁸ Everett, *Terence Davies*, pp. 155–8.

One of the more dramatic departures that Davies makes in the film functions to put Lily squarely in this tradition. Late in the film, when Lily is working in the service of a dubious social climber, Selden visits and attempts to persuade her to leave this unsuitable employment. In the novel, Lily is unsure of his motives, and deflects him with her usual arch repartee while keeping her emotions largely in check. As the narrator observes: 'The situation between them was one which could have been cleared up only by a sudden explosion of feeling; and their whole training and habit of mind were against the chances of such an explosion'.³⁹ In the film, Anderson departs from the self-controlled performance that has functioned both as a marker of the period genre and a critique of the artifice of Bart's society. Instead, she plays the scene as the heroine of a 1950s Hollywood melodrama, as she stubbornly clings to her pride in an angry, self-righteous defense of her self-destructive course of action. The same style is in play in her final encounter with Selden, where, in another departure in tone from the novel, she sobs as she says good-bye, without letting him realize what she is about to do. The film does not, in these moments, replace the previous mannered acting style with naturalism, in an attempt to show us the 'real' Lily Bart beneath the performance dictated by society, thereby giving her an authentic self, but rather substitutes for it another recognizably mannered style, albeit one with which the contemporary audience is more familiar. The substitution of one style for the other in the film is necessary in order to retain and to highlight the queerness of Lily Bart, which is bound up in a self-conscious performance of selfhood.

³⁹ Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 273.

Moreover, the melodramatic acting style clearly places that queerness in relation to the history of cinema and opens the story of Lily Bart up to a more contemporary queer reading. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests that, in distinction to gay and lesbian identifications, "Queer" seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person's undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation'.⁴⁰ Here Lily's style of self-performance coincides with a

⁴⁰ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 9.

41 Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 316.

statement of filiation that is at the same time an ethical refusal, which in the novel Lily identifies as ‘a kinship with all the loving and forgoing in the world’, a classic example of the paradoxically flamboyant self-denial that marks the melodramatic heroine.⁴¹ To Selden’s charge that she is acting in an undignified manner, she haughtily replies in lines that do not occur in the novel, ‘Where does dignity end, and rectitude begin?’ She will remain a member of the ‘working classes,’ rather than partake in certain distasteful exchanges: either of herself as marriageable object, or the compromising letters that would blackmail Bertha Dorset but simultaneously injure Selden.

By placing Bart in the heritage of the Hollywood melodramatic heroine, the film makes Lily, along with Aunt Mae and Countess Olenska, available for the kind of identification with the tragic and glamorous outsider that frequently marks one version of the queer subject. The aesthetics of excessive self-performance that define the melodramatic heroine should not deflect attention from the ethical choice that frequently underlies and anchors that performance. The melodramatic heroine chooses integrity over a much-desired belonging with a society whose rules she discovers she cannot accept. This choice (and the queer subject’s subsequent identification) is occasioned by both positive and negative causes, central among which is both a literal and psychic disconnection from what is seen as the real or normal world. In the case of Lily Bart, this disconnection results primarily from economics:

As she looked back she saw that there had never been a time when she had had any real relation to life. Her parents too had been rootless, blown hither and thither on every wind of fashion, without any personal existence to shelter them from its shifting gusts. She herself had grown up without any one spot of earth being dearer to her than another.⁴²

42 Ibid., p. 314.

Although the Barts’ alienation is more specific to its time and class, Lily’s alienation comes to be representative of disconnectedness of the modern, urban experience identified by Kracauer and Benjamin.

Indeed, Ruth Bernard Yeazell’s classic account of the novel, ‘The conspicuous wasting of Lily Bart’, argues that Lily’s story reads like a case history for Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class*.⁴³ The novel offers a feminist perspective on the relation between gender and economics within this particular historical moment and, at every stage of her decline, Lily is acutely aware of the gendered nature of her dilemma. While there is no evidence that Wharton read Veblen, Yeazell points to the way that Lily is consistently figured as a commodity in this world, and notes the text’s awareness of the emergence of the new mass culture, including all of the various cinema and popular theatre references. This reading articulates well with Gunning’s analysis of the pleasure of the early cinema of attractions, and its appeal to a newly emergent urban subject, one ‘whose daily experience has lost the coherence and

43 Ruth Bernard Yeazell, ‘The conspicuous wasting of Lily Bart’, *English Literary History*, vol. 59, no. 3 (1992), pp. 713–34.

⁴⁴ Gunning, 'Aesthetic of Astonishment', p. 41.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 43.

immediacy traditionally attributed to reality'.⁴⁴ For such a subject, the terror in the cinema was not a fear of being hit by a real train, but rather 'an encounter with modernity. From the start, the terror of that image uncovered a lack, and promised only a phantom embrace.'⁴⁵ It is the particular virtue of Davies's adaptation to bring these two key insights together; the unreality of the opening shot of the film, with the train and Lily poised in front of a black void, and its citation of cinematic tradition, force us to read the story in relation to larger cultural histories. The juxtaposition of Lily Bart and train engine allegorizes and prefigures the collision between Lily and modernity that will leave Lily dead at the end of the film.

In that light, we can begin to see that the best, perhaps the only, way to fully realize the feminist cultural commentary of Wharton's *The House of Mirth* is through a filmic adaptation. As with any period film, the danger is that the analysis might be viewed as only relevant to the past and to the particular social and economic system in which it is located, making it easier to romanticize the suffering and excuse the oppression. Attention to the historical specificity of the story is nonetheless crucial, because the novel does document a newly emergent subjectivity and a new consciousness that, I have been arguing, is peculiarly modern and dependent on a particular set of social and economic conditions as well as on the emergence of a particular group of technologies of mobility, including the train and the cinema. Lily Bart exemplifies this new consciousness, which is marked by a self-conscious performance of selfhood and which is linked to a cinematic consciousness. The novel labels her a queer subject, but it does not mean this in quite the same way that the term is currently understood. It does, however, point to a historical continuity between the particular historical subjectivity represented in Bart, and the film's queer consciousness.

Because of its position within Davies's canon, the film offers us an insight about the essential modernity of queer subjectivity and its emergence with and through the cinema. In *The Long Day Closes*, cinema is a central part of Bud's life; in *The Neon Bible*, it becomes a metaphor for David's process of memory and in *The House of Mirth* the cinema is associated with a new way of experiencing the world. All three films establish a temporal disjunction between past events and a present understanding of their meaning. The films themselves use this double vision to seek to understand what these past events made possible in the present, not through any explicit reflection, but rather through the particular ways in which the past is visualized. *The House of Mirth* is interested not just in the particular inaugural moment of a certain subjectivity, but also in registering how the memory of that moment has circulated and how its circulation via the cinema has enabled the ongoing emergence of a queer consciousness.

The story of Lily Bart is the story of an encounter with modernity which results for her in a particular awareness: the sense that society is a collective performance, beyond which, however, there is neither

freedom nor authentic being, but rather nothing (or, in the case of Countess Olenska, Poland). In *The House of Mirth*, this results in a self-consciousness that is particularly imagined and experienced in the visual realm. This we see not just in Lily's imagination, but also visualized in the film in those moments where we see both her and her reflection: first, in a mirror in Selden's apartment, and later, in the window of the train, when she is practising her wiles on Percy Grice. In these key moments, we see her seeing herself performing. But on a more profound level, it is via the temporal disjunction of the period film, in its insistence on the distance between Lily Bart and Gillian Anderson and the loss that that implies, that the queer consciousness of the film emerges. The point is not just that in the film the heterosexual Lily Bart comes to embody a version of queer consciousness, but that the temporal disjunction of the period film itself produces a queer consciousness. The film shows how the knowledge of the years intervening between the novel and the present has changed the meaning of our memory of the past, and shows how the novel means differently now. It shows us, in other words, in what new sense Lily Bart has become the heroine of a queer episode.

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Louis Le Prince: the body of evidence

RICHARD HOWELLS

There are two ways to tell the story of Louis Aimé Augustin Le Prince. The first is as an adventuresome ‘whodunit’. This is the tale of the Leeds-based, French-born gentleman-inventor who would have been credited as the creator of cinema had he not disappeared without trace on the eve of unveiling his technological miracle in the USA. Had he not vanished, he would have beaten both the Lumière brothers and Thomas Edison to cinematic and international fame by at least seven years. The other way is the approach taken in this article, in which I shall attempt to discover, regardless of ‘whodunit’, what Le Prince had actually achieved. This will involve both the identification and evaluation of the available evidence, with particular emphasis on the contemporaneous, late-nineteenth-century material. As well as presenting ‘the body of evidence’ relating to Le Prince’s claims, the article raises broader questions about the significance of ‘primacy’ in technological invention. The history of Le Prince serves as a case study of the cultures and mythologies that surround the ‘moment’ of cinema’s birth. How strong is Le Prince’s case as the inventor of motion pictures? What is ‘the body of evidence’ and how should we evaluate it?

Louis Aimé Augustin Le Prince was born in Metz, France, on 28 August 1841.¹ This engaging and cosmopolitan man was educated in Belgium, France and Germany. In 1866 he moved to Yorkshire, England, to become a partner in Whitley Partners (brassfounders) of Hunslett Road in Leeds. Here, he worked as a draughtsman and translator, became a partner in the firm and in 1869 married his employer and senior partner Joseph Whitley’s daughter, Lizzie. Augustin and Lizzie became energetically involved in the intellectual and artistic life of Victorian Leeds, a thriving industrial and commercial city in the north of England. They were active members of Leeds Literary and Philosophical Society

¹ Birth certificate of Louis Aimé Augustin Le Prince, Archives Municipales, Metz, France. In her unpublished memoirs, Le Prince’s widow Lizzie gives his year of birth as 1842, presumably in error. See S. Elizabeth Le Prince and Adolphe W. Le Prince, ‘Missing chapters in the history of moving pictures’, unpublished typescript, undated, p. 1, the Le Prince Papers. In this paper, I will continue to note the source(s) of basic biographical information only if there is a dispute or discrepancy surrounding the details.

and set up the Leeds Technical School of Art, teaching drawing, enamel making and pottery. Unfortunately, Whitley Partners (which still provided Le Prince's main source of income) began to fail and in 1882 the Le Prince family sold up in Leeds and moved to New York City.

The Le Princes became involved in a number of business and creative endeavours in New York, although none of them proved particularly successful. In 1885, however, Le Prince began his experiments with moving pictures. This is a period in which, although the rest of the family now resided in New York, Le Prince himself moved around between the USA, France and Leeds; he went wherever the facilities were available.

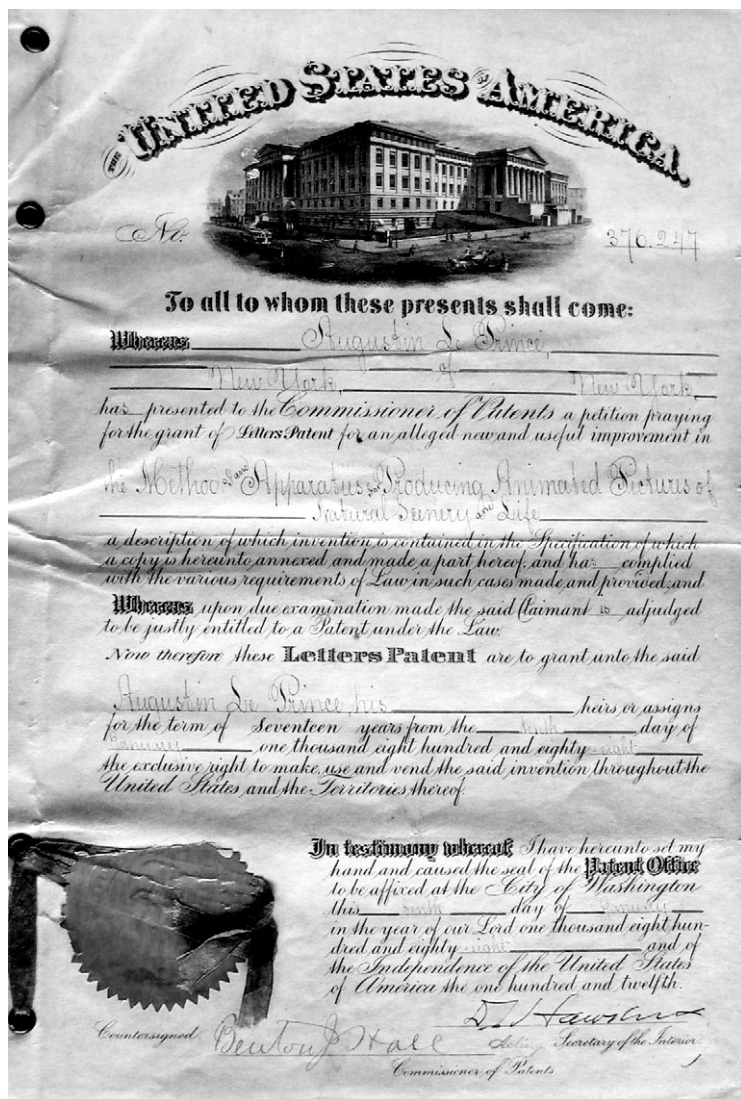
On 2 November 1886, Le Prince filed US patent application 376,247: 'Method of and apparatus for producing animated pictures of natural scenery and life'. This was a sixteen-lens camera and projection system that used two rolls of Eastman's newly available gelatine and paper film. Working in Paris in the summer of 1887, he constructed a sixteen-lens camera, small projector and stereoscopic viewing device. On 10 January 1888, the US patent was duly granted to Le Prince (figure 1). On the very same day, he applied for the British patent, which also included provision for a single lens camera and projector. By March that year, he was back in Leeds, beginning work constructing the single lens camera.

On 14 October 1888 Le Prince ran his first trial of the single lens camera in Joseph Whitley's garden in suburban Leeds. Le Prince's eldest son, Adolphe, danced and played the melodeon on the steps of his grandfather's house. In a second sequence, the entire Whitley family performed for the camera in the garden by forming a kind of impromptu conga line. We can date the event so precisely not only because of Lizzie and Adolphe's memoirs and later testimony, but also because Mrs Whitley (senior) died just ten days after the filming. However, the most famous of Le Prince's early films was taken not in the garden but on Leeds Bridge, again in the autumn of 1888. Le Prince's trial produced another successful sequence of pictures.

The cinematography was clearly going well, but projection remained a problem. To try to solve this, Le Prince buried himself in his workshop in Woodhouse Road, Leeds: a site subsequently and until recently occupied by the BBC. It was here in 1889 that Le Prince first projected his Leeds Bridge footage, assisted by Jim Longley (mechanic), Walter Gee (electrical engineer) and Frederick Mason (carpenter). Le Prince used a somewhat clumsy system of gelatine positives mounted onto glass. These were slotted into belts and cranked past the arc lamp and lens. A steam generator/dynamo provided the electricity. The process was not entirely successful because of the weight and the fragility of glass. He only achieved about seven frames per second, but still, the pictures did move.

What Le Prince needed to project the pictures more quickly and therefore realistically was something better than gelatine mounted on glass. What he wanted was a light, strong, transparent photographic medium which would withstand the heat, speed and strain of projection at sixteen frames per second or above. Just two months later, Le Prince

Figure 1
Le Prince's American patent
dated 10 January 1888 for: 'the
Method of and Apparatus for
Producing Animated Pictures of
Natural Scenery and Life'.
Source: The Le Prince papers, the
Le Prince-Huetzel family,
Memphis, Tennessee.
Photo: the author.



took delivery of his first batch of just the new medium he needed: celluloid. He assembled rolls of four-by-twelve-inch strips cut from a twelve foot square sheet and spliced them together. Le Prince knew he had cracked it, and dispatched his son Adolphe back to New York to help Lizzie find a suitable venue for public performance. In late 1889 Lizzie took out a lease on the prestigious Morris-Jumel Mansion in Washington Heights in Manhattan for a grand public premiere of Le Prince's new marvel. But on 16 September 1890 Le Prince boarded a train at Dijon, having agreed to meet up with some Yorkshire friends in Paris. He was never seen again, alive or dead, and to this day, his body has never been

- 2 In 2004 a regionally produced British television 'tabloid' magazine programme claimed to have found photographs from the Paris morgue that could have been of Le Prince. Although this information cannot, of course, be discounted out of hand, the programme was not academically rigorous in its methodology. Consequently, it would be unwise for the scholarly community to accept this as firm evidence without further investigation.
- 3 Le Prince and Le Prince, 'Missing chapters'.

found.² Lizzie and the Le Prince family were convinced of foul play, especially as they saw the Lumières and the Edison Company going on to take the credit for, and making a fortune out of, what they believed to be Le Prince's invention.

So, there we have both the basic 'whodunit' and the outline of the Le Prince story. Much of the evidence I have presented so far has been circumstantial and/or based on Lizzie and Adolphe Le Prince's unpublished memoirs: 'Missing Chapters in the History of Moving Pictures'.³ This is, of course, a highly valuable resource for the researcher; it is a first hand-account that serves as a rich and important source for the biography of Le Prince and his family. But while it is invaluable on matters of fact, it is less reliable in terms of an *evaluation* of Le Prince's achievements as a motion picture pioneer. As the work of the inventor's wife and son, it forms a highly partial account in which Lizzie, in particular, demonstrates unswerving loyalty to her beloved husband's memory, together with a conspiracy-theorist's zeal for producing and even naming villains.

This is the basis and approach of Christopher Rawlence's TV documentary and book of 1990: *The Missing Reel: The Untold Story of the Lost Inventor of Moving Pictures*. Rawlence is a very good story teller and his work on Le Prince deserves all due acknowledgement, which is freely given. But from a strict, scholarly point of view, Rawlence does certain things that are much more in the narrative rather than the academic traditions. His book is structured and edited like a film, and in it we encounter cinematic devices such as flashbacks, imagined scenes and apparently reconstructed conversations.⁴ In order to gain a more scholarly appreciation of Le Prince's work and claims, it is necessary to make a non-narrative case, based upon the documented evidence.

Before we begin that analysis in depth, however, it is appropriate briefly to survey the rest of the existing literature on Le Prince. This will not detain us long as Le Prince is, at the moment, neither well-known nor well-chronicled. Before Rawlence, the only substantial writing on Le Prince took the form of two articles by the electrical engineer E. Kilburn Scott. Scott published two articles on Le Prince, one in 1923 and another in 1931. The first was 'The Pioneer Work of Le Prince in Kinematography' in the *Photographic Journal*.⁵ The second, 'Career of L.A.A. Le Prince', appeared twice in the same year: first in the *Photographic Journal* in May and then re-printed in July in the *Journal of the SMPE* (Society of Motion Picture Engineers).⁶ Scott researched Le Prince energetically. However, his articles are, from an academic point of view, infuriatingly lacking in citation to support his assertions. For example, his article of 1931 contains only two 'references', and one of these is to his own earlier article of 1923. Scott had, on the other hand, actually met Le Prince and visited him in his Woodhouse Lane workshop. Scott is therefore of value to us as an eye witness rather than an objective chronicler – but more of that later.

- 4 Christopher Rawlence, *The Missing Reel: The Untold Story of the Lost Inventor of Moving Pictures* (London: Collins, 1990).
- 5 E. Kilburn Scott, 'The pioneer work of Le Prince in kinematography', in *Photographic Journal*, vol. 63 (August, 1923), pp. 373–8.
- 6 E. Kilburn Scott, 'Career of L.A.A. Le Prince', *Journal of the SMPE*, vol. 17 (July 1931), pp. 76–83.

7 Alan T. Sutherland, 'The Yorkshire pioneers', in *Sight and Sound*, vol. 46, no. 1 (Winter 1976–7), pp. 48–51.

8 Sutherland, p. 33.

9 Le Prince is occasionally mentioned in broader published accounts of early cinema, but typically as a marginal character. He is also the subject of an article cited by Scott (1931): 'Crawford, Merritt: "Louis A. A. Le Prince"', *Cinema*, 1 (Dec, 1930), pp. 28–31. Unfortunately, neither the British Library nor the British Film Institute has been able to locate a copy of this article.

10 Stephen Herbert, *A History of Pre-Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2000), three volumes, p. xi.

11 The original application for Le Prince's UK patent 423 was made on 10 January 1888. The complete specification was left on 10 October 1888 and accepted on 16 November 1888. Source: UK Patent Office.

Allan T. Sutherland's article 'The Yorkshire Pioneers' includes Le Prince in a survey of that county's contribution to early film history.⁷ His account of Le Prince's life and work is familiar to anyone who has read Scott's, and like Scott, Sutherland's sources are only scantily revealed. Simon Popple's study 'Le Prince's Early Film Cameras' in *Photographica World* in 1993 was written while he was working as a researcher at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television at Bradford. His article is much more focused in content and (thankfully) overt about its sources. Sutherland acknowledges his debt to Scott and 'what has been regarded as the standard version ever since',⁸ together with references to Rawlence's book and documentary film.⁹ Finally, we should note a brief and tantalizing line in Stephen Herbert's three-volume *A History of Pre-Cinema* of 2000. Here, he refers to Le Prince boldly as: 'the pioneer of early motion pictures'. Herbert contends, reasonably, that Le Prince's interest in moving pictures began while he was working for a company exhibiting panoramas, but why he is accredited as 'the pioneer of early motion pictures' (my emphasis) is not made clear or expanded upon.¹⁰

What we observe, then, with the existing literature on Le Prince is a sedimentary accrual of received wisdom reaching back to Scott (who was partly present yet scanty with his sources) and to Lizzie and Adolphe Le Prince (who were fully present yet particularly partial). While I do not aim in any way to discredit the contribution of these and others to an understanding of Le Prince's accomplishments, I do want to go 'back to source' to establish a firm foundation for further research.

The obvious starting place is with the patents awarded to the inventor on both sides of the Atlantic. Le Prince's American patent, number 376,247, was granted in January 1888 – the year of the Leeds Bridge sequence. This is, of course, very solid evidence for Le Prince's claim to primacy – especially when we consider that this patent pre-dates both the Lumière Brothers' and Thomas Edison's first public showing by more than seven years (and seven years is indeed a very long time in technology). The patent for 'The method of and apparatus for producing animated pictures of natural scenes and life' involved a sixteen-lens camera and projection system, using two rolls of Eastman's newly available gelatine and paper film. The document is duly signed and formalized not only by Le Prince but also by Mumm and Co., his New York patent attorneys.

Although it was granted in early 1888, the application was originally filed as far back as November 1886. This has the effect of advancing Le Prince's claim to primacy still further. Just as the US patent was granted, Le Prince made British patent application number 423 of 1888: 'Improvement in the method of and apparatus for producing animated photographic pictures and that he is the true and first inventor thereof'. This included – crucially – provision for a single-lens camera and projector. It was submitted by Le Prince's London patent agents Thompson and Boulton, and accepted on 16 November 1888.¹¹

This information takes us far beyond the anecdotal and (understandably) partial evidence presented in their memoirs by the inventor's wife and son. The dates take on a further perspective when compared with Edison's Kinetograph and Kinetoscope patents, which were granted only in 1893. Le Prince's patent pre-dates this by a whole five years. Indeed, in January 1892, the American patent examiner rejected all claims on Edison's patent application number 403534 because: 'The claims are anticipated by patents to Le Prince 376247, Jan. 10, 1888'.¹² Two days later, Edison's patent application 403535 had numerous claims rejected on the same basis – the pre-existing Le Prince patent (along with the work of several other inventors).¹³ If we add to that the Lumière brothers' first public screening in 1895 and Edison's Vitascope of 1896, the gap between the generally accepted 'inventions' of cinema and Le Prince's original patent stretches to seven.

It is important, however, not to jump to the conclusion that the existence of patents in advance of Edison and the Lumière brothers conclusively establishes Le Prince as the inventor of motion pictures. It is worth pausing for a moment, therefore, to consider precisely what is involved with a patent, and what sort of evidence a patent provides. We will use the British system as an example of the principles and key concepts involved.¹⁴

The process begins with an application. Typically, this comprises a detailed description of some 20 pages, together with an appropriate drawing or drawings. The application is filed with the Patent Office and the real business of examination begins. Specialist patent examiners study the application and compare it with the 'prior art' of existing inventions. Ultimately, the invention must clear three tests in order for a patent to be granted: (a) *novelty* – which is an exact test; (b) *inventiveness*; and (c) *sufficiency*. In other words, the inventor must have described the invention well enough for someone else to make a go of it. Put another way, the examiners have to be convinced that it would work. If all the tests are passed the patent is granted – and Le Prince's invention passed each of these tests.

On the face of it, then, the granting of the patents proves that Louis Aimé Augustin Le Prince was the inventor of cinema. In practice, however, the existence of a patent does not prove everything because in the primacy debate the existence of a patent is not a clear, objective and indisputable marker. We should also note that there is a complicated difference between the *filing date*, that is to say, when a patent is lodged, and the *date of grant* which is different and could be five years later. The *granted patent* is the one around which litigation revolves, and consequently the precise wording can make crucial differences. The *priority date* is different again – and can be a technicality. More than that, there is a crucial difference between UK and US patent law: UK law prioritizes the person who registers first, while the US system privileges the person who 'invents' something as opposed to simply registers it. This highlights two further significant obstacles in the search for

¹² Gordon Hendricks, *The Edison Motion Picture Myth* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1961), p. 133.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 134. In both cases, it is important to note that the Le Prince patent was one of several (and not the sole) reasons for the rejection of the Edison claims.

¹⁴ I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Jason Boakes, a partner at Leeds-based patent agent and attorneys Harrison Goddard Foote, for helping my understanding of patent law and its relevance to the case of Le Prince.

primacy: first, the concept of 'invention' is open to interpretation and second, the same concept can mean different things in different parts of the world. Indeed, to a patent agent, a 'concept' and an 'invention' are themselves subtly different things anyway. As we are dealing here with an invention that was international in both its conception and its significance, the seemingly simple question of the first patent turns out to be increasingly more complicated. The existence of a patent, by both Le Prince and others, therefore, is evidence, but not itself proof.

In reality, it seems, the grant of a patent seems simply to achieve one a better place at the negotiating table, and that table is typically in the courts where, in the harsh light of legal reality, money talks. A contest between the fatherless Le Prince family and the rich and notoriously litigious Edison Company, for example, would be unlikely to be an even one, no matter what the state of the patents. That is precisely what happened.

In 1898, the Le Prince family became involved in Equity 6928: Thomas A. Edison vs American Mutoscope Company. As we can see, the family were not one of the main parties to the action, but they believed that by riding 'piggy back' with AMC and their claim against Edison, they could themselves further the cause of Augustin (Louis) Le Prince.

The case was brought in the US Circuit Court for the Southern District of New York to decide whether or not: 'Thomas A. Edison was the original, first and sole inventor or discoverer' of cinematography. Le Prince's accomplishments could form a major part of the case to discredit Edison's claim. Moreover, if it could be shown that Edison was not the first and only inventor of moving pictures, the path would be cleared to show that it was Le Prince.

AMC claimed that 'the apparatus for taking and exhibiting photographs of objects in motion was well and widely known prior to the alleged invention of the said Edison'. By appearing on behalf of AMC, the Le Prince family believed they could exploit the case as a platform to win Augustin the public and legal recognition they believed he deserved. The Le Prince family case here was passionately researched and presented by Adolphe, now a Chemistry undergraduate at Columbia University. In the event – and hardly surprisingly – it was the young undergraduate who was exploited by the lawyers on both sides. They both used him – expertly – for their own ends. Although Adolphe had both his father's cameras waiting outside, he was never allowed to present these in court. They would, the family believed, have destroyed the cases of both appellant and defendant, leaving Le Prince the victor. As Lizzie observed in her memoirs, American Mutoscope were only interested in Le Prince: 'in so far as my son's testimony set aside the claims of their rivals. Establishing our claim would have meant their paying royalties to us.'¹⁵

Three years later, in 1901, the court ruled: Equity 6928 pronounced Thomas A. Edison to be first and sole inventor of the moving picture camera. In 1902, however, Equity 6928 was reversed by the US Circuit

¹⁵ Le Prince and Le Prince, 'Missing chapters', p. 73.

16 Cited in Hendricks, *The Edison Motion Picture Myth*, p. 174.

17 Ibid., p. 175.

18 Ibid., pp. vii–viii.

19 Ibid., p. viii.

Court of Appeals: Edison was now *not* the sole inventor of moving pictures. The court declared: ‘It is obvious that Mr Edison is not a pioneer in the large sense of the term. . . . He was not the inventor of the film.’¹⁶ They continued: ‘Undoubtedly Mr Edison, by utilizing this film and perfecting the first apparatus for using it, met all the conditions necessary for commercial success. This, however, did not entitle him under the patent laws a monopoly of all camera apparatus capable of utilizing the film.’¹⁷

It is evidence such as this that has provoked writers like Hendricks to try to debunk what they see as the Edison ‘myth’. According to Hendricks (himself a supporter of W.K.L. Dickson), the history of early film is obscured by a ‘morass of well-embroidered legend’, complicated by the ‘immodest claims of Edison himself’.¹⁸ Indeed, Hendricks joyfully cites Julian Hawkins in the *Electrical Engineer* of 18 November 1891: ‘if Mr Edison would quit inventing and go in for fiction he would make one of the greatest novelists this country ever saw’.¹⁹

Unfortunately for Adolphe, he never got to hear the reversed verdict. One afternoon in July 1901, Adolphe was found dead with his duck hunting gun at his side near the family summer cottage at Point O’ Woods on Fire Island in New York State. It may have been suicide; it could have been an accident. Lizzie was convinced it was a second murder. The boy knew too much and had made the mistake of saying so, in court.

But we are running away with things here. If we are not careful, we will again become embroiled in the breathless narrative that this article seeks to transcend. And by sniping at Edison, we are also in danger of becoming drawn deeper into the primacy debate that we have sought to avoid. We need, therefore, to return to a more dispassionate analysis of what the court case has to tell us about Le Prince himself.

What the court case does not tell us is who invented motion pictures. In 1901 the American courts ruled with all due gravity that Edison invented the cinema. In 1902 they ruled with equal gravity exactly the opposite. This is not to attack a specific court and a particular legal system. The point, rather, is this: our discussion of the patent system showed us that patents themselves do not prove primacy because disputes end up going to court for a decision. But even when a case reaches court, the decision could go either way and, as we have seen, sometimes both! Just as we did with the patents, then, we should view even court cases as evidence but not proof in our pursuit of primacy.

If neither the patents nor the courts are ultimately conclusive, we have to continue looking elsewhere. The strongest physical evidence of Le Prince’s achievement is the survival of two of his moving picture cameras, now in the permanent collection of the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford, England. They have an excellent provenance: both were donated to the Science Museum, London, by the inventor’s daughter Marie in 1930. Following Le Prince’s disappearance, the family had remained and settled in the USA, but

maintained contact with Kilburn Scott (who had written the seminal article of 1923) and Alexander Barclay, the Science Museum's Keeper of Chemistry. Barclay in particular was instrumental in getting a plaque erected on the site of Le Prince's old workshop on Woodhouse Lane. Marie came over from America specially for the unveiling ceremony in December, 1930, which was filmed and distributed by Universal News under the title 'Father of the Movies'. The commentator concluded the bulletin: 'It's quite likely that, but for Louis Le Prince, you wouldn't be seated in a cinema as you are now!'²⁰

The cameras presented by Marie are Le Prince's sixteen-lens cinematograph camera of 1887²¹ and the single-lens camera-projector of 1888.²² Both are now (2006) on public display at Bradford. The Science Museum technical file compiled at the time of acquisition²³ notes that the sixteen-lens camera was made in Paris in 1887 and used a battery of sixteen lenses and two rolls of gelatine film. The pictures were recorded alternately on each roll. The eight lenses facing the first roll were released in rapid succession, and then the remaining eight on the other side followed suit while the first roll was being moved on ready for a successive set. The lenses were operated by a complex system of double shutters released by electro magnets connected to a battery and a rotary switch. Two additional lenses served as view-finders, one for each roll of film. The camera is, of course, incomplete as the film chamber is missing, as it was at the time when Marie donated the camera to the museum.

Le Prince's single-lens camera is still more interesting. Although it was constructed the following year, it is both closer to the technology used today and was also the device used to make the most important of Le Prince's moving pictures. According to the original Science Museum technical file for this item,²⁴ it was made in Leeds in 1888 and was in fact the second of his single-lens devices. What appears to be a second lens is, in fact, the viewing and focusing device. The camera used 2 3/8 inch-wide un-perforated film which was wound past the lens via a pair of spools. The film was held fast for exposure by a flat, brass plate, and the exposure controlled by way of a circular slotted brass shutter 'which revolves behind the lens in the same way as a modern shutter'.²⁵ The camera doubled as a projector, for which a light source (originally an arc lamp) was fitted to the back.

The cameras present strong evidence for the extent of Le Prince's achievement in motion picture technology by 1888. They are described and discussed in greater detail by Scott in 1931,²⁶ Sutherland in 1976,²⁷ Rawlence in 1980²⁸ and Popple in 1993.²⁹ But the existence of the cameras themselves, supported by the patents, takes us back to 1887/1888, to before the secondary literature had begun to accrue. Indeed, the physical evidence is so strong that it has even been speculated that Le Prince's cameras are fakes made retrospectively to justify the family's claims on his behalf.³⁰ We can tackle this issue in two ways. First we can turn to a detailed examination of the surviving equipment with a view to dating it accurately and placing it within (or without)

²⁰ Universal Talking News, *Father of the Movies*, 77 feet, edition 46, released 18 December 1930. The film footage is lost, but the script remains in the British Universities Film and Video Council/ITN/Reuters database, BUND number 137463.

²¹ Science Museum inventory number 1931–3.

²² Science Museum inventory number 1931–4.

²³ Science Museum acquisition/technical file 1931–3/4/5.

²⁴ Science Museum acquisition/technical file 1931–3/4/5.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Scott, 'Career of L. A. A. Le Prince', pp. 76–9.

²⁷ Sutherland, 'The Yorkshire Pioneers', pp. 48–9.

²⁸ Rawlence, *The Missing Reel*, pp. 209–15, 217–19, 221–7, 230–31, 236–41, 282.

²⁹ Simon Popple, 'Le Prince's Early Film Cameras', *Photographica World* 66 (September 1993), pp. 33–7.

³⁰ See Popple, 'Le Prince's Early Film Cameras', p. 35.

31 This was done at the instigation of Chris Rawlence, who was researching what was to become *The Missing Reel* ten years later. The correspondence between Rawlence (10 October 1980) and J.P. Ward of the Photography and Cinematography Collections (15 January 1981), together with the researcher's notes, is filed in the NMPFT archives, file number 1931–3/4/5.

32 J.P. Ward letter, NMPFT archives, file number 1931–3/4/5

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

Le Prince's lifetime and the context of the written evidence. Fortunately, such an investigation has already taken place.

In the winter of 1980, the Science Museum in London conducted a detailed examination of Le Prince's single-lens camera in an attempt to establish both the date and place of its manufacture.³¹ J.P. Ward of the photography and cinematography section drew on the expertise of curators from a number of different areas, together with senior workshop technicians, to assess the wood, hinges, spools, lenses and screws used in the camera. Such information proves very useful to anyone seeking to question or establish the camera's authenticity – and, thus, the extent of Le Prince's accomplishments by the time of his death.

An immediate clue is given by the camera's hinges, which were engraved 'Brampton's Patent'. This patent was taken out in Birmingham, England, on 25 June 1881. This certainly appears to position the camera at the appropriate time and place (Leeds in 1888) to support claims on behalf of Le Prince. Ward admitted in his notes, however, that, although the hinges had been patented and manufactured in England, they could still have been exported to and used later in the USA.

The film spools were made from vulcanite, a material which was widely available on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1880s. Similarly the screws failed to reveal a specific provenance: those used on the fixing gate were either British 1/8 Whitworths, 40 TPI (threads per inch), or US standard machine screws (course thread) series no. 4, 0.125 inch, 40 TPI. The wood screws could similarly have been manufactured in either the UK or the USA.

As for the lenses, these were 'Apparently of the Petzval type . . . almost certainly made as photographic portrait lenses'.³² The lenses had been pierced to take Waterhouse stops (an early form of aperture adjustment pre-dating the iris). Ward noted that this was odd, as purpose-built projection lenses for magic lantern shows were readily available at the time. There was no maker's name or sign of country of origin on the lenses themselves.

This brings us, most importantly, to the camera body itself. The Science Museum investigation found that the body was made of light Honduras mahogany, while the feet were probably of apple wood. The construction: 'indicates a joiner's work rather than that of a cabinet maker. Our technicians felt that it was typical British workmanship rather than American.' Ward added: 'Personally, I do not think it was made by a professional camera maker'.³³

In conclusion, Ward noted: 'I am afraid that it is all rather inconclusive. . . . On balance, I suppose the evidence would seem to favour British construction but I would not be prepared to bet money on it.'³⁴ Ward was being rather cautious. Although it is true that the lenses, screws and film spools could have been manufactured anywhere, it is clear that the hinges were made in Britain after 1881. Although they certainly *could* have been exported and used in America later, it is, on balance, far more likely that they were used in the country in which they

were made. So far, then, we have nothing that points to the camera being made in America; everything else is either neutral or in favour of British construction.

It is the analysis of the case, however, that tips the balance most significantly towards Le Prince, Leeds and 1888. The Science Museum technicians believed the workmanship to be typically British rather than American. More than that, though, they concluded that the case had been made by a joiner rather than a cabinet maker, and certainly not by a professional camera maker. This points precisely to the man who is documented as having constructed Le Prince's single lens camera: Frederick Mason, joiner of Leeds. In a deposition sworn before the American Vice-Consul at Bradford, Mason was later to confirm that he had 'made all the woodwork and the patterns for metal castings' for Le Prince and, that he had specifically made the camera returned to England by Marie Le Prince in 1930. This is the camera that was subjected to the Science Museum analysis. And it was this same camera, Mason continued, that had been used to film both the Le Prince family at Roundhay and the Leeds Bridge footage in the autumn of 1888.³⁵

³⁵ Declaration of Frederick Mason Before Geo L. Fleming, Vice Consul of the United States of America at Bradford, England, April 21, 1931; The Le Prince Papers. Mason's role as the woodworker on Le Prince's cameras is also noted by Scott, 'The pioneer work of Le Prince', p. 375.

We may confidently conclude, therefore, that there is no evidence to support any allegation that Le Prince's surviving single lens camera is a fake. On the contrary, an examination of the evidence actively supports its authenticity. More subtly, perhaps, we might argue that any spurious allegation that this camera was fraudulently constructed after the event serves to support Le Prince's claims. Simply put, it would only be claimed that the camera was a fake if it was in every other way convincing as a prior claim on the invention claimed by Edison (and others). It is, in the vernacular, a 'backhanded compliment' that unwittingly, and with the aid of later analysis, serves only to support Le Prince.

So much for the cameras, but what of the original film? Le Prince's original footage is lost. We have neither the negatives exposed in the camera nor the positives made for projection. What we do have, however, are re-animated sequences of the original footage in which the individual pictures do move to create the illusion of one, fluid scene from life. We can see Adolphe Le Prince dancing and playing the melodeon on the steps of his grandfather's house at Roundhay, together with pedestrians and horse-drawn traffic moving over Leeds Bridge in October 1888.³⁶ By tracing the provenance of the modern re-animation, we will be able to interpolate the story with the surviving physical evidence.

³⁶ The Roundhay and Leeds Bridge re-animations exist as 35 mm footage and beta video and, for convenience, can be seen on the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television website at: http://www.nmpft.org.uk/insight/onexhib_cin.asp (accessed 16 November 2004).

³⁷ See Mason declaration; also Scott, 'The pioneer work of Le Prince', p. 375.

In both the sixteen- and single-lens cameras, Le Prince used Eastman's new paper-backed stripping film.³⁷ This gelatine-based material had been introduced in 1885 and was designed, of course, for still photography. The 2 1/4 inch-wide film was run between feeder and take-up spools and exposed as it passed by the mechanical shutters. But although Le Prince had to an extent succeeded in adapting still film for cinematic use, he had

not conceived the now familiar sprocket holes that would have ensured the accurate advancement from frame to frame. This led to issues with image registration that were to prove problematic not only with his own attempts at projection but also (as we shall see) with re-animation over 100 years later.

Although Le Prince's original negatives are lost, they were at some stage contact printed onto photographic paper and mounted onto numbered strips of card. Each card contained just four vertically and sequentially numbered frames – presumably as a consequence of the dimensions of the printing paper available. It seems likely that the original gelatine movie film was cut to facilitate this, but that can only be a matter of conjecture. Similarly, it is not certain by whom, at what time and for what purpose the card strips were made. The most likely scenario, however, was that this was done by Adolphe Le Prince as easily portable and demonstrable evidence that he could produce during the Edison vs Mutoscope court case of 1898.

In the same way that the original footage has been lost, so has the majority of the printed frames. The Leeds Bridge footage, for example, appears to have run to at least 129 frames (as 129 is the last recorded frame number). The National Museum of Photography, Film and Television (NMPFT) animation, however, is of just twenty frames (numbers 110–129). Similarly, the Roundhay animation is of only twenty of the original frames. It is these few frames that provide the basis for the NMPFT animations, but even that correspondence is not straightforward.

The NMPFT animations are made not from Le Prince's originals or even positives. Rather, they are made from photographic plates copied in May 1931 from (presumably) Adolphe's contact strips. The timing coincides with Marie Le Prince's visit to Leeds in December 1930, when she both unveiled the commemorative plaque to her father and donated the cameras to the science museum. It is the view of Michael Harvey, Curator of Cinematography at NMPFT, that the plates were made from sequence strips also brought over by Marie.³⁸ These ten-by-twelve-inch plates were made (in negative) by the London Science Museum. Each plate showed five strips of approximately four frames laid side by side; it is not clear whether the original footage had been cut specially for or prior to the making of the copy negative plates. Plates were made of the 1888, single-lens camera sequences: the family in the garden at Roundhay, Adolphe playing the melodeon and, finally, the traffic on Leeds Bridge. An additional plate was made apparently from prints from the sixteen-lens camera. This showed a bearded man in a smock overall walking in front of and posing by a factory-type building. In her memoirs, Lizzie recalls of her husband: 'He then went to Paris and built his sixteen-lens machine. He mailed to me in New York a sample of its work on collodion, showing the changing postures of a French workman in his national blouse, taken on the Avenue Trudaine.'³⁹ It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that these are one and the same.

³⁸ Correspondence with Michael Harvey, Curator of Cinematography, National Museum of Photography, Film and Television, Bradford, England, 5 October 2004 and 16 October 2004.

³⁹ Le Prince and Le Prince, 'Missing chapters', p. 36.

⁴⁰ The photograph numbers are SM5115 (Adolphe playing the melodeon), SM5116 (Leeds Bridge), SM5117 (figures in garden) and SM5118 (bearded man in the street). The remaining plates are SM5116 and SM5117.

⁴¹ Correspondence with Michael Harvey, Curator of Cinematography, National Museum of Photography, Film and Television, Bradford, England, 5 October 2004.

⁴² The strip is marked '2A' in hand on the front; the back is marked (variously) 'Catalogued 55', '31' and '126-129'.

Technically, however, the sequential action of the sixteen-lens camera is less successful, and this sequence has not been made into an animation. Paper prints from all of the Le Prince plates are archived at NMPFT in Bradford, but (curiously) only two of the plates themselves appear to remain.⁴⁰

It is from the plates, however, that the NMPFT animations were made. This was done in 1997 by Michael Harvey and Paul Thompson of NMPFT, together with Jean Dominique Lajoux at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris. Harvey and Thompson printed the frames in close register from the Science Museum negatives; Lajoux did the animation.⁴¹ The results were preserved on both 35 mm film and as a Beta video master, and it is these that provide Le Prince's moving pictures as we know them today.

If there is any kind of 'missing link' in this provenance, it would appear to be with the card-mounted, positive paper strips from which the Science Museum negative plates were made. There has clearly been some attrition here. The original Leeds Bridge sequence, for example, seems to have comprised at least 129 frames, but the Science Museum plates were made only from the final twenty of these. The sequence we know today, therefore, accounts for only one-seventh of the original footage. More than that, I have been able to locate only one surviving card strip: frames 126-129 of the Leeds Bridge sequence among the Le Prince Papers (figure 2).⁴² That brings the original 129 frames down to only four copies.

The provenance of Le Prince's moving pictures is by no means straightforward, but is a provenance all the same. A key question,



Figure 2
Frame 128 of Le Prince's moving pictures of traffic on Leeds Bridge, October 1888. Source: The Le Prince papers. Photo: the author.

however, remains. Although the diligent efforts of Harvey, Thompson and Lajoux have succeeded in making Le Prince's pictures move today, what evidence is there that they moved in 1888?

Projection, it is widely agreed, had always been Le Prince's main problem. He had clearly figured out how to take photographs in rapid succession on a single roll of film, but we recall the considerable efforts he had made to move them sufficiently quickly and smoothly through a projector without them either breaking or bursting into flame. Scott, writing in 1923, observed: 'Le Prince had already used sensitized gelatine in his camera, but was not able to use it in his projector, as the heat of the lamp made it cockle and threw the picture out of focus, and the gelatine films themselves were not strong enough to stand the wear and tear'.⁴³ Scott's observations are worth taking particularly seriously as he had personally visited Le Prince in his Leeds workshop precisely at the time when the inventor was working on the projection problem.⁴⁴

Le Prince wanted a focussing lamp for his projector and Scott, an electrical engineer, had gone to see him about it. While there, Scott also learned about the contributions of Longley (the mechanic) and Mason (the woodworker), who were assisting Le Prince at the time, together with his son Adolphe.

Scott recalls that Le Prince's early positives were made from glass and mounted into moving bands for projection. In another method, the positives were mounted in mahogany frames.⁴⁵ We do not need to be cinematographers to realize that this could only have been of limited success. Le Prince knew it, too. The crucial step was the use of celluloid film as the medium for the positives. With historical hindsight, this may seem obvious to us today, but it is vital to understand that for Le Prince in 1888/1889 this was a seminal accomplishment.

Mason told Scott that Le Prince used celluloid made by Blair of St Mary Cray – whose rights were later bought up by Eastman at Rochester.⁴⁶ Yet there is further, physical evidence to support and date Le Prince's crucial step in the discovery of celluloid to solve the projection problem. This can be found, without fanfare, among the Le Prince Papers in the form of a simple, handwritten envelope containing a 'piece of celluloid used by Le Prince' (figure 3).⁴⁷ The papers also suggest an additional, ironic, source for Le Prince's celluloid: the Lumière company in Lyon. The Lumière brothers were marketing a supple new film-stock invented by another Frenchman, George Balagny, and the Le Prince Papers contain an empty envelope bearing the printed blue label: '*Plaques Souples Balagny: Préparées à Lyon par A. Lumière & Ses Fils*' (figure 4).⁴⁸ This helps Le Prince's case in two ways. The first is chronological: Hendricks notes independently that the Balagny films 'were mass produced by the Lumières in Lyons, and very popular in France as of May, 1888 and before'.⁴⁹ This fully explains the discovery of the Balagny/Lumière envelope among the Le Prince papers, while at the same time placing Balagny, celluloid and Le Prince at just the right time together in the narrative of his invention. Further corroboration is

⁴³ Scott, 'The pioneer work of Le Prince', p. 374.

⁴⁴ Scott gives the date as '1888 or 1889' in *ibid.*, p. 375.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

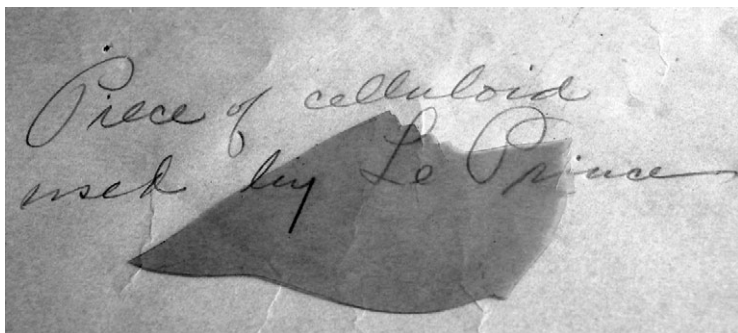
⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

⁴⁷ The Le Prince Papers

⁴⁸ The Le Prince Papers

⁴⁹ Hendricks, p. 170 (note).

Figure 3
Envelope containing 'Piece of
celluloid used by Le Prince'.
Source: The Le Prince papers.
Photo: the author.



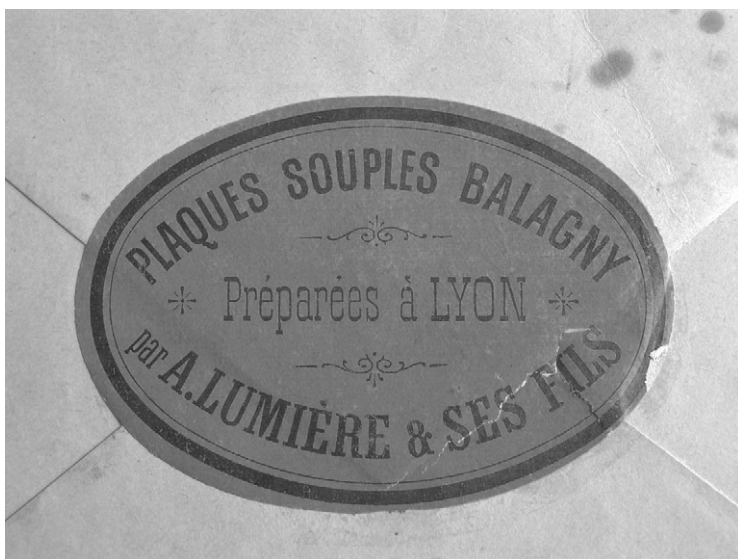
⁵⁰ Le Prince and Le Prince, 'Missing chapters', p. 36.

⁵¹ Cited in Hendricks, *The Edison Motion Picture Myth* p. 174.

provided in Lizzie's Le Prince's unpublished memoirs. Here, she records: 'During a visit to France he procured some longer celluloid films from Lumiere & Fils, to whom he had repeatedly applied for continuous lengths of film, and sent them to his assistant, but they still required joining for long reels'. A hand-written insertion to the typescript adds: 'Le Prince then created the demand for long celluloid'.⁵⁰

Secondly, the Balagny evidence supports Le Prince by fitting snugly within the American appeal court's reasons for rejecting Edison's claims to be the sole inventor of moving pictures. The court pronounced that Edison's predecessors had invented their basic cinematic apparatus 'during a period of transition from plates to flexible paper film, and from paper to celluloid film'.⁵¹ These original pioneers were held back only by a lack of suitable photographic material and were merely waiting for it to

Figure 4
Seal of envelope for Balagny
celluloid film, made in Lyons by
the Lumière company. Source:
The Le Prince papers. Photo: the
author.



52 Ibid., p. 175.

53 Scott (1931) has Le Prince working with celluloid in both 1888 and 1889, and this correlates with Hendricks's dating of the availability of the Balagny film, an envelope for which is found among the Le Prince Papers (figure 4).

54 Le Prince and Le Prince, 'Missing chapters', p. 19. Lizzie locates the house near 168 St and Broadway.

55 Deposition of Henry M. Woolf, 4 April 1889, the Le Prince Papers.

become available. What Edison had done, said the court, was simply to exploit the new celluloid film when it finally did appear by 'perfecting the first apparatus for using it'. This, in turn, led to the American's undoubted 'commercial success'.⁵² The solution had indeed been celluloid; Edison was indeed the first to capitalize upon it commercially, but Le Prince had already figured this out independently, and was already and demonstrably using it himself between 1888 and his mysterious disappearance in 1890.⁵³

Let us just take stock for a moment. We have been trying to establish precisely what Le Prince had achieved with motion pictures by the time of his mysterious disappearance in 1890. We have the (dated) patents with all the technical drawings and specifications, the cameras and even the celluloid. The patents take us back to 1886, the cameras to 1887, the picture sequences to 1888 and the celluloid to 1888/1889. The NMPFT animation of 1997 proves that the Leeds Bridge and other footage of 1888 could be made to move today – and convincingly at that. What we still need, however, is evidence that Le Prince's whole system actually *worked at the time*, just as the inventor disappeared almost on the eve of the unveiling of his moving pictures to America and, indeed, to the world.

Clearly, there is no evidence of any kind of final, public demonstration of Le Prince's invention. Among writers about Le Prince, Killburn Scott, as we have seen, was an eyewitness to the construction of the projector, but not to the exhibition of the moving pictures. For that, we have to rely on the testimony of the people who were actually there.

According to Lizzie Le Prince, her husband had succeeded in presenting moving pictures as early as 1885. She states this in a caption to a photograph of Belmont House, which was at that time his New York home: 'Where the First Working Models Were Completed and Moving Pictures Thrown Upon a Screen in 1885'.⁵⁴ Again, although we should not discount this out of hand, we must at the same time caution against taking evidence from an aggrieved widow at face value. What we ideally need is evidence from people from outside the family who were prepared legally to attest to what they saw.

Fortunately, such evidence clearly exists in the form of sworn affidavits from individuals who witnessed Le Prince's work at the experimental stage. These provide convincing evidence that he had succeeded in making and projecting moving pictures as far back as at least 1886. Henry Wolf of New York City declared in front of a Notary Public that on a number of occasions he had visited Le Prince at his Manhattan home and 'was there shown by him several appliances and apparatus for producing moving pictures. I saw exhibited on a screen a moving figure of a man, which gave the impression of life-like movement. This was shown to me the latter part of 1886'.⁵⁵

Back in England, engineer John Vine made a deposition to the US consulate, declaring:

during the years Eighteen Hundred and Eighty Eight and nine I saw Mr. Augustine Le Princes machine for throwing pictures onto a Screen the same moving with life like rapidity. The Pictures I saw were taken from Leeds Bridge traffic [sic].⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Deposition of John William Vine, 19 September 1898, the Le Prince Papers.

James Longley, the mechanic who had assisted Le Prince at his Leeds workshops on Woodhouse Lane, went so far as to declare (with refreshing directness) to American Consul Felix Dexter:

I made an improved camera of one lens for taking Photographs at a great number per minute. I also partly made the delivering machine for throwing the Pictures at the Same rate as taken in the Camera, onto a large white Screen. . . . I also saw the series of pictures of Mr Joseph Whitley and Wife and Adolphe Le Prince and a Young Lady dancing in the gardens at Rhounday Cottage. also a series of Mr Adolphe Le Prince dancing and playing on a melodeon. The best pictures I saw were of Leeds Bridge where the tram horses were seen moving over it and all the other traffic as if you was on the Bridge Yourself. I could even see the smoke coming out of a man's pipe who was lounging on the Bridge [sic].⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Deposition of J. W. Longley, 19 September, 1898, the Le Prince Papers.

Longley's deposition therefore does more than simply add to the stack of evidence piling up on behalf of Le Prince. Here he specifically mentions three sequences (Adolphe, the family at Roundhay and Leeds Bridge), the provenance of which we have already traced, and he confidently declares that the technology *worked*. With his own eyes, Longley had seen Le Prince's pictures move and he swore an oath in front of the American Consul that he had done so.

So, was Le Prince the true inventor of moving pictures? We must not, however, overreach ourselves for two reasons. First, because such a discussion would involve a comparative, chronological and technological study not only of Edison and the Lumières, but also of lesser-known contenders such as Marey and Friese-Greene. Such an analysis lies beyond the scope of this article. We have sought to establish simply what Le Prince himself had achieved and by what date. Second, what we may think of as the ontology of invention proscribes such an attempt anyway. What, after all, *is* invention? And who, therefore, may be deemed to be an inventor? Neither question elicits a simple answer. According to Arnold Pacey, the idea of technical progress is a modern one and so the idea of the inventor is similarly new-found. Indeed, 'During much of the history of Christian civilization in Europe, the modern idea of progress hardly existed'.⁵⁸ The change was observable only from the age of Guttenberg, who was credited as the 'sole inventor of printing' in around 1448. By the end of the fifteenth century, people had broadly come to think of the inventor as the possessor of a 'special creative genius that the majority of ordinary men did not possess'.

⁵⁸ Arnold Pacey, *The Maze of Ingenuity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1992), p. 29.

59 Ibid., pp. 56–7.

60 The patent was first employed in England in 1623. Ibid., p. 57.

61 Samuel Smiles, *The Lives of the Engineers*, three volumes (London: John Murray, 1862).

62 Samuel Smiles, *Self Help* (London: John Murray, 1866).

63 Samuel Smiles, *Character* (London: John Murray, 1872).

64 Graham Gooday, 'Faraday reinvented: moral imagery and the institutional icons of Victorian electrical engineering', in *History of Technology*, vol. 15 (1993), pp. 190–205.

65 Ibid., p. 194.

66 Ibid., p. 193.

67 Pacey, p. 57.

68 Ibid., p. 59.

With this began the idea of human (as opposed to divine) creativity, and this, in turn, 'led to the idea of invention as a unique act of creation'.⁵⁹ What is believed to have been the first patent was awarded in 1421 to the Renaissance architect Filippo Brunelleschi, and the concept of the patent (more of which later) contributed still further to the idea and the elevation of the individual inventor.⁶⁰ There is a strong cultural tradition, then, of the representation of the inventor as a lone genius who (ideally) leaps from his or her metaphorical bath having experienced a 'eureka moment' from nowhere.

In addition to moments of inspirational revelation, popular accounts of invention have also lionized the inventor as someone who proceeds by way of virtue, application and perspiration. This in turn invests the inventor with personal virtue and an almost moral authority. An archetypal exponent of this approach was the (appropriately for us) Leeds-based editor, author, and Victorian moralist Samuel Smiles (1812–1904). Smiles used the platform of his editorship of the *Leeds Times*, together with a well-attended series of public lectures in the city, to champion the inventor (and especially the engineer) as someone who advanced society through an earnest combination of graft, duty and character. In addition to his articles and lectures, his books, such as the three-volume *Lives of the Engineers* (1862),⁶¹ *Self Help* (1866)⁶² and *Character* (1872)⁶³ went into numerous editions and helped represent the popular and perceived correlation between invention, individualism, industry and virtue.

According to Graham Gooday, inventors could be posthumously reinvented in order to fit this preferred vision.⁶⁴ He provides us with the example of Michael Faraday, whom he argues was practically canonized following his 'posthumous elevation' to 'iconic status'. Championed (for their own purposes) by the Institute of Electrical Engineers, this even led to what Gooday describes as a 'cult of Faradism'.⁶⁵ What he especially stresses for us is the 'moral significance' (his emphasis) of Faraday's posthumously created image; the Victorians warmed not only to his technological successes, but also to the belief that he achieved what he did by virtue of 'patient experiment'.⁶⁶

A unifying factor remains, however, as both Renaissance inspiration and Victorian application are conjoined by the popular idea of the inventor as a gifted individual. For scholars such as Pacey, though, this remains deeply problematical. Although he has soberly chronicled the historical evolution of the concept of the inventor, he argues that today: 'the focus on invention is much more valid in the popular imagination than it is to technicians. It is misleading to present invention as the achievement of individual genius and not social progress'.⁶⁷ For him, invention proceeded not by individuals and instances but, rather, by 'clusters' and 'movements'.⁶⁸

Pacey is correct to differentiate between popular and technical accounts of invention, especially as the distinctions remain cloudy even today. Initially, Renaissance and Victorian misconceptions appear to be

69 James Watson, *The Double Helix* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1968).

70 Dava Sobel, *Longitude* (New York, NY: Walker, 1995). The quotation is taken from Sobel's sub-title to the book.

71 Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 44.

72 Ibid., p. 91.

73 See Langton Winner, *Autonomous Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1977), p. 66.

74 A.L. Kroeber, *Anthropology: Culture Patterns and Processes* (New York: Harbinger Press, 1963), p. 150. Much of Kroeber's argument is also cited and summarized by Winner, *Autonomous Technology*, pp. 66–7.

75 Kroeber, *Anthropology*, pp. 172–3.

moderated in the more respectable, 'middlebrow' accounts of the twentieth century. A reading of *The Double Helix*, for example, reveals that Crick and Watson had strong competitors in their race to solve the riddle of DNA,⁶⁹ while even Dava Sobel's best-selling *Longitude* concedes that John Harrison was in fact one of a number of clockmakers grappling with the question of accurate navigation at the same time. Nevertheless, the subtitle of her book still describes him as: 'the lone genius who solved the greatest scientific problem of his time'.⁷⁰ So, popular misconceptions are both corrected and reinforced in the same narrative breath.

We would be wise, therefore, to maintain our focus on the history and philosophy of science and invention rather than risk distraction from its more popular (mis)understandings. This remains by far the more challenging option, though, for if we dig still deeper, the whole concept not just of inventors but of invention itself becomes increasingly problematical.

Writing particularly about the nineteenth century (in which we found Le Prince at work), Jacques Ellul saw the process of invention as 'a kind of chain reaction' in which the discoveries made at the start of the century generated those that followed. There was, he continued: 'a logical and foreseeable succession of events, once the first steps had been taken'.⁷¹ Yet despite this apparent 'foreseeability', invention for Ellul remained ultimately unpredictable: 'It can't be known with certainty even a short time in advance in what quarter the new technical invention will be produced'.⁷² These two apparently dichotomous theories combine to lead us, however, towards a culturally determined historicity of invention.

The first step is taken when we begin to notice how often things seem to be invented simultaneously by two people working independently (examples include photography, the telephone and, in the case of the cinema we may argue, at least three people were involved).⁷³ For the anthropologist A.L. Kroeber, this 'tended to instil a conviction that inventions may be inevitable, within certain limits; that given a certain constellation and development of a culture, certain inventions must be made'.⁷⁴ Kroeber did not believe, however, that this inevitability needed to dampen the spirit of scientists and inventors. To the individual inventor, attribution remained all important, because it determined who was to get the prize, along with the credit and esteem of his peers. To the world at large, however, the attribution of the invention to a particular individual was really 'a matter of indifference – except for sentimental partisanship – because the invention was going to be made anyway'. By this stage, he argued, the invention was 'in the air' and now that the time was 'ripe' it was only a question of who, among the various simultaneous contenders, would work the idea out feasibly. 'More precisely', concluded Kroeber, 'inventions are culturally determined'.⁷⁵

According to Kroeber, determinism here means that there is a 'definable relation between a specific condition of a given culture and the

76 Ibid., p. 173.

77 Pacey, *The Maze of Ingenuity*, p. 59.

78 Kroeber, *Anthropology*, p. 173.

79 Ellul, *The Technological Society*, p. 91.

making of a particular invention'.⁷⁶ This of course makes perfect sociological sense, but it also and at the same time removes the individual from centre stage. More than that, it introduces a seemingly 'unscientific' element of happenstance into the equation. Pacey, we remember, saw technology advancing by a progression of movements and 'clusters of ideas and techniques'.⁷⁷ This means that, as Kroeber put it, at crucial moments in the history of science and technology, 'the discovery is now in the air, or the time is ripe for it'.⁷⁸ In that case, as Ellul contends, while the general conditions for an invention may be culturally explainable, the precise circumstances of its emergence remain unpredictable: 'It can't be known with certainty even a short time in advance in what quarter the new technical invention will be produced'.⁷⁹ The socially determined historicity of the invention of cinema takes Ellul's argument still further: In addition to being unable to predict in 'what quarter' (New Jersey, Lyons or Leeds?) an invention will come into being, neither can we predict in whose persona (Edison, the Lumières or Le Prince?). It could be almost anyone.

For Le Prince, this is something of a mixed blessing. If we were to argue that Le Prince was the sole inventor of the moving pictures, the cultural determinist argument would undermine his claim – just as it would the claim of any single individual to have been solely responsible for any invention. But if, on the other hand, we were to argue that the so far unacknowledged Le Prince should take his rightful place among those who have already gained recognition, the deterministic argument opens up the field to accommodate any number of contenders, including Le Prince.

According to Kroeber, we recall, the public at large had little real interest in primacy debates apart from 'sentimental partisanship'.⁸⁰ We should not, however, underestimate the importance of such partisanship to the public understanding of science – and especially when national pride is at stake. In cases of dispute, popular attribution tends to be arranged on distinctly nationalistic lines. With the 'invention' of photography, for example, the British tend to champion Fox Talbot; the French Niépce (or possibly Daguerre). With the telephone, it is Reis in Germany but Bell in Scotland, while some Americans still support Gray. The invention of television, meanwhile, may be attributed to Zworykin in Russia, Baird in Britain or Farnsworth (or possibly Jenkins) in the USA. With the cinema France and America divide between Edison and the Lumière Brothers. Such championship, it might be argued, can be rather more than simply sentimental. When instilling a sense of national superiority, or trying to inspire the next generation of schoolchildren, partisanship over primacy can take on distinctly political overtones.⁸¹ Le Prince, on the other hand, lent himself to no such partisan appeal. He had left his native France to marry and to work in England, but in England he remained distinctly French. More than that, he finally moved with his family to America, where he took American citizenship (thus renouncing both the British and the French).⁸² But citizen or not,

80 Kroeber, *Anthropology*, p. 172.

81 Gooday notes the expedience of elevating Faraday within the internal politics of electrical engineers. See 'Faraday reinvented', p. 201.

82 Le Prince became an American citizen in 1888.

⁸³ I am aware, of course, that I could be accused of partisanship because of both my own and Le Prince's connections with Yorkshire; I began my research into Le Prince while at the University of Leeds. I maintain, however, that, while the Yorkshire connection inspired my interest in Le Prince, it does not in itself explain the subsequent support I have for Le Prince.

⁸⁴ Angus Buchanan, *The Power of the Machine* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 22.

⁸⁵ Graham Gooday, 'Re-writing the "Book of Blots": critical reflections on histories of technological "failure"', *History and Technology*, vol. 14 (1998), pp. 265–91.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 266–7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 280–5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

Le Prince could never be American in quite the same way as 'native sons' such as the Ohio-born Edison. Le Prince truly belonged nowhere; his support could be neither sentimental nor political. He attracted the favour of no partisans.⁸³

Patents and court judgments, however, should (theoretically, at least) rise above partisanship. More than that, we have heard from Pacy that the granting of patents has contributed to the popular idea of the individual inventor. Le Prince certainly had patents in profusion. On the other hand, we have also seen that a patent does not guarantee either reward or recognition – it simply adds to one's hand should the case come to court. On top of that, we have also seen that even the courts are only partially successful as final arbiters in matters of invention. The New York courts, we remember, ruled in two entirely opposite directions on the invention of moving pictures. Further, these were only the judgements of the New York courts; what may be so in one jurisdiction may be entirely different in another. And finally, the courts do not legislate for the popular imagination. For many people (and especially in the USA), Thomas A. Edison *was* the inventor of motion pictures – despite the fact that the US Circuit Court of Appeals had solemnly ruled otherwise.

All this may lead us to suppose that Le Prince's invention was a failure. The consequences of such a conclusion would be dire, especially if we agree with Angus Buchanan that, since 'failed' inventions have not helped transform the modern world, they are therefore historically 'irrelevant'.⁸⁴ However, the historicity of 'failure', just like that of invention, turns out to be a much more complex proposition. According to Gooday, 'historians should not treat "failure" as residing in the technology itself'. Rather, the whole concept of failure is socially imbedded and frequently the responsibility of users rather than inventors.⁸⁵ Gooday proceeds to pick apart precisely what we mean by 'failed' inventions. To understand failure he says we need to be clear about what we mean by 'success' and even this is a contested concept. Nuclear power stations, for example, are either a success or a failure depending on one's point of view. We need, therefore, to 'challenge the viability of any strong success/failure distinction'.⁸⁶ Gooday then goes on to identify three further points of relevance to us. First, he disputes that there is ever an agreed point of 'closure' in which everyone agrees whether an invention has been a success or not. This is because (a) there is in reality no one final and irreversible moment of decision and (b) there is rarely a consensus anyway.⁸⁷ Second, the success and subsequent development of a technology is not simply due to its 'original' inventor – it leaves his or her hands once it enters the public domain. Gooday uses the example of the motor car,⁸⁸ but we could equally cite the cinema. Third, failure may simply be a matter of 'contested attribution'.⁸⁹ These points combine to lead Gooday to conclude that: 'notions of success and failure are highly perspectival in nature: such categories gain meaning only by partisan privileging and deprivileging of different constituencies and perspectives'.⁹⁰ What historians need to do, therefore, is to 'expunge

91 Ibid., p. 286.

the categories of “success” and “failure” from their historiographical lexicon’.⁹¹

92 Ibid.

If Gooday is correct, then, we should not allow ourselves the simple luxury of designating Le Prince’s ‘invention’ either a ‘success’ or ‘failure’. Indeed, the case of Le Prince is still further complicated. We have every reason to believe that Le Prince’s technology worked and did so in advance of the accepted ‘inventors’ of moving pictures. According to Gooday, therefore, any apparent ‘failure’ of his technology would not be located in the hardware but, rather, in ‘the socio-technological relations of its usage’.⁹² Yet in our case, we cannot blame Victorian society for not taking up his invention because Victorian society never got to know about it. Yes, Le Prince had been awarded his patents and several people had sworn on oath that they had seen his pictures move in private. The fact remains, however, that Le Prince never revealed his invention to the public. The equipment was ready, the family waiting and the venue prepared, but Gooday’s ‘human users’ were never allowed to make Le Prince’s invention either a success or a failure because they never got to know about it in the first place.

93 Letter from Le Prince to Lizzie, 24 May 1890, the Le Prince Papers.

On 24 May 1890 Le Prince wrote from Leeds in his final surviving letter to his wife Lizzie in New York: ‘All else seems ready for the final – it is now only a few days, next week will settle it’.⁹³ Next week, of course, did not. Within four months Le Prince had vanished for ever, and if he is remembered today, it is mostly for the mysterious circumstances of his premature demise. But this article has shown that in addition to the fate of his body, we should also pay our scholarly respects to the body of evidence for what Le Prince had achieved.

Le Prince’s technology was not significantly different from that of Edison or the Lumière brothers (or, put another way, Edison and the Lumières’ was not significantly different from Le Prince’s). These essential similarities, together with the way in which societal adaptation takes over where invention leaves off, combine to make it seem reasonable to assume that film today would still be much the same whether or not Le Prince had been credited with its invention. To that extent, then, the present of the cinema remains unaffected by Le Prince and primacy debate. Had he lived, however, we have every reason to believe that the *history* of the cinema would have been very different.

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The case of the phantom fetish: Louis Feuillade's *Les Vampires*

ELIZABETH EZRA

¹ Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (London: BFI, 1996).

On the cover of Laura Mulvey's collection of essays entitled *Fetishism and Curiosity*, there is a well-known illustration of Musidora in the role of Irma Vep from Louis Feuillade's ten-episode film serial *Les Vampires* (1915–16).¹ This image of a head floating in space, surrounded by a question mark, was apparently, and aptly, chosen to suggest the 'curiosity' of the book's title. However, it also evokes the 'fetishism' of the title, as it provides a substitute for an absence within the book, which contains no mention of *Les Vampires*, Musidora or Irma Vep. This familiar fetish-image of Irma Vep's head, taken from a contemporary publicity poster, perfectly embodies one of the serial's central motifs. This article examines the recurring image of the severed head in *Les Vampires* in relation to its various metonymic functions. In particular, I argue for a reconsideration of its emblematic status as a symbol of castration, and suggest how the image of the severed head in Feuillade's serial can be linked to the anxieties and traumas engendered by World War I.

Les Vampires follows the exploits of a gang of criminals, masters of disguise, who terrorize the Parisian bourgeoisie while being pursued by investigative journalist Philippe Guérande (played by Edouard Mathé) and his sidekick, a reformed vampire and some-time mortician named Mazamette (played by celebrated character actor Marcel Levesque). Shot between the summer of 1915 and the spring of 1916, the serial makes no explicit mention of the war that was slaughtering millions. This apparent omission could perhaps be explained by the fact that audiences were looking for diversions to distract them from the horrors going on around them. Feuillade knew exactly what he was distracting viewers from,

2 Pierre Sorlin, 'Cinema and memory of the Great War', in Michael Paris (ed.), *The First World War and Popular Cinema*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 11.

3 Pierre Sorlin, 'France: the silent memory', in Paris, *The First World War*, p. 118.

4 Colette Godard, *Le Monde*, 7 September 1972. Unless otherwise stated, all English translations are my own.

5 Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 76.

6 Anton Kaes, 'The cold gaze: notes on mobilization and modernity', *New German Critique*, vol. 59 (Spring/Summer 1993), pp. 105–17.

7 Claude-Marie Trémois, *Télérama*, no. 1926 (1986).

having seen these horrors first-hand while serving as a sergeant earlier in the war, before being released from duty because of a heart condition in July 1915. In its refusal to show the physical violence of the war explicitly, *Les Vampires* mirrors French newsreels of the period, which 'hid neither the destruction nor the suffering of the soldiers but never reveal[ed] a corpse, a mutilated body or a wounded man'.² This omission was even more marked in feature films, according to Pierre Sorlin, who notes '[t]he silence of French cinema' on the subject of the war.³ However, it is not quite accurate to say, as one commentator did when the serial was shown at the Cinémathèque Française in 1972, that 'the war is completely forgotten in the ten episodes of *Les Vampires*'.⁴ Richard Abel has speculated about the symbolic presence of the war in *Les Vampires*, wondering 'if, in their conjunction of the real and the unreal, the banal and the unexpectedly terrifying, the films also convey, through displacement, the French experience of the war—the absurd proximity of normal life to the ghastly horrors of trench warfare'.⁵ Abel's suspicion can indeed be borne out by close analysis of the films.

Feuillade's serial predates the birth of the vampire film genre that viewers today would recognize, which began with *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau, 1921), based on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Although both kinds of film reflect similar anxieties about infiltration and physical violation, Feuillade's serial is more concerned with urban crime than with rustic folklore. Anton Kaes has argued that crime films made during World War I or in the inter-war period, including *M* (Fritz Lang, 1931), reflected a sense of paranoia that can be traced to the enemy's hidden but pervasive presence in wartime trenches. Invoking Ernst Jünger's theory of 'total mobilization', Kaes contends that the war mentality had pervaded civilian life to the extent that enemies – in the form of criminals – were thought to be lurking in the shadows of the great metropolises.⁶ From this argument, it can be inferred that the sleuthing necessary to track down criminals, so prevalent in *Les Vampires*, is linked to the preoccupation with code-breaking during the war.

The Great War's presence is in fact encrypted in Feuillade's serial, which invites its own decoding in a series of clues offered to viewers. The first clue to the enigma involves the very depiction of codes within the films, surely not insignificant at a time when Feuillade was unable to film on location in urban centres because people worried that movie cameras might be instruments of German espionage.⁷ The serial abounds in veiled semiotic systems such as cryptograms (as in the third episode, entitled 'Le Cryptogramme rouge'), numerical codes (episode nine), invisible ink (episode eight) and anagrams (as when the letters in the name 'Irma Vep' dance around on a marquis to form the word 'Vampire', in the third episode). The repeated emphasis on deciphering scrambled messages evokes the practice of code-breaking used in wartime espionage. The French were the most effective cryptanalysts of World War I, possessing 'the strongest team of codebreakers in Europe', which

8 Simon Singh, *The Code Book* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), p. 104.

9 Francis Lacassin, *Pour une contre-histoire du cinéma* (Lyon-Arles: Institut Lumière / Actes Sud, 1994), p. 177.

10 Of course, Mazamette's single status raises the question of the absent mother, presumably dead, but it is Mazamette's status as a father that is repeatedly emphasized in the films.

11 Alfred Cobban, *A History of Modern France*, vol. 3 (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 111.

they had developed as a defensive measure after their defeat in the Franco-Prussian War.⁸

Other clues to the war's hidden presence include the use, in episode five, of a poisonous gas with which the vampire gang immobilizes a roomful of party guests in order to rob them (Francis Lacassin describes this scene in terms that seem unconsciously to evoke the war, as the transformation of 'a ballroom in to a gigantic mass grave'⁹). Later, in the ninth episode, Irma wears a gas mask taken from a chemical laboratory where she has been helping the new vampire leader conduct experiments; the vampires again attempt to use poisoned gas on their enemies in the tenth episode. These aspects of the plot would have evoked the first use of poison gas as a weapon of war by the Germans in the spring of 1915, just a few months prior to the filming of these episodes. Similarly, the oversize cannon that the villain Satanus uses to blow up a Parisian cabaret would certainly conjure up the 'Big Bertha' used in battle for the first time in World War I. Finally, the exploding ship from which Irma narrowly escapes death (for which Feuillade appears to have used actual newsreel footage) would have reminded audiences of the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the British passenger ship bombed by the Germans, also in the spring of 1915, which killed some 1400 civilians and made headlines around the world.

The serial's most pointed allusion to World War I, however, occurs in its almost obsessive allusions to fathers, either actual *pères-de-famille*, or men who could potentially father children with the hundreds of thousands of women left partnerless as a result of the war, contributing to the much-discussed fear of declining birthrates in France at the time. We learn in the first moments of the first episode, and are reminded several times thereafter, that one of the central characters, Mazamette, is a single father of three small boys.¹⁰ Mazamette's lapse, and later relapse, from respectability and righteousness into a life of crime, is motivated by his need to provide for his young sons, as he reminds Philippe by brandishing a photograph of himself with his progeny at several opportune moments throughout the serial. Then too, the serial's morally upright hero, the investigative journalist Philippe Guérande, lives at home with his widowed mother, while identifying with his deceased father through his paternalistic treatment of Mazamette, which includes boxing his ears when he disapproves of his behaviour, showing him a moralistic passage from La Fontaine's fables when Mazamette threatens to return to his criminal ways, and bestowing his blessing upon him when he wishes to marry. Finally, Irma Vep, a foundling, appears to be seeking a father figure in her liaisons with the succession of Grand Vampires, gang leaders with whom she invariably falls in love. The persistence of these images points to a cultural preoccupation with fathers at a time when many more of them were going off to the front than were coming back. In the first four months of the war alone France had lost about 850,000 men, who were either dead, wounded, missing in action or taken prisoner.¹¹

Absent fathers are figured throughout the films by means of a recurring image, that of the severed head, which appears in several guises. Indeed, the serial is capped by the title of the first episode, 'La tête coupée/The severed head'. In this episode, the connection between the image of the severed head and fatherhood is established metonymically, as the film's first mention of the missing head of a man decapitated by the vampire gang is sandwiched between two scenes that allude to absent fathers. The mention of the severed head is preceded by a scene in which Mazamette shows Philippe a photograph of himself with his three small sons, along with his wet-nurse bill. It is followed by Philippe's return home to bid farewell to his widowed mother before embarking upon the investigation.

The image of the severed head also appears in the metonymic form of a hat. Mazamette spends a brief period as a mortician, in an effort to reform his errant ways. As proof of his newfound trustworthiness, he shows Philippe a note (episode 3) that reads 'Municipal funeral home certificate. We certify that M. Oscar-Cloud Mazamette has proved to be a devoted and punctual employee, about whom our clients have never made the slightest complaint.' Of course, the joke here is that the beneficiaries of Mazamette's services would not be able to complain even if they wanted to, given their posthumous state. In the sixth episode, 'Les Yeux qui fascinent/The mesmerizing eyes', the top hat is displayed in a glass case on Mazamette's mantel, a constant reminder of his decision to follow the path of moral rectitude in becoming an honest working man, but also a symbolic reminder of the dead the film cannot mention explicitly (this silencing being aptly evoked in the name of one of the vampires, 'Le Père Silence/Father Silence').

The missing member implicitly rears its ugly head again in the eighth episode of the serial, titled 'Le Maître de la foudre/The master of lightning'. The episode begins when Philippe and Mazamette inform Irma that Moréno, the lover whom she has described as a father figure, has been executed: Mazamette makes a slitting motion across his throat to indicate that he has been beheaded. Then, the new Grand Vampire, Satanas, disguised as a priest and addressed as 'mon père', blows up the ship that Vep is travelling on by firing a cannon out the window of his hotel room. Mazamette, having been newly reunited with one of his sons, played by the well-known child actor Bout d'Zan, goes off in search of the culprit, and discovers a hatbox which, instead of a top hat, contains a projectile bomb. The shot of the shell in the hatbox recalls the shot of the severed head in 'La tête coupée', creating a chain of signifiers linking the severed head in its box in the first episode to the mortician's hat and then to the bomb in the hatbox in the eighth episode. When Satanas, referred to as 'le chef' – literally, 'the head' – of the vampire gang, plants a bomb in his own top hat later in the episode, the link is reinforced. The fantasy underlying the war was that the missing head would be recovered (as in 'La tête coupée') and restored to the body familial. But as the war progressed, the missing head in Feuillade's serial

was replaced in its box first by a mortician's hat, and then by a bomb: first, by a representative of death, and then by the agent of its own destruction.

The image of the severed head was not an innovation of the World War I era. At the end of the nineteenth century, there were severed heads everywhere. Jean-Louis Leutrat points out that 'cinema was born when Salome was carrying around the head of John the Baptist. Heads were falling a lot in this period, in literature, in painting, the theatre, and even in public squares.'¹² Alluding to the widespread (if temporary) perception by early film audiences that close-ups showed dismembered bodies, Leutrat continues: 'There were links in the public imagination between the guillotine's blade, the camera, and close-ups'.¹³ The severed head appears perhaps most insistently in the work of the film pioneer Méliès, whose better-known titles in this genre include *Un homme de têtes* [*The Four Troublesome Heads*, 1898]; *Une bonne farce avec ma tête* [*Tit for Tat*, 1903]; *Le mélomane* [*The Melomaniac*, 1903]; *L'homme à la tête de caoutchouc* [*The Man with the Rubber Head*, 1901]; and *Le bourreau turc* [*The Terrible Turkish Executioner*, 1904], as well as his stage show, *Le décapité récalcitrant*.

Ever since Freud's pointed equation between decapitation and castration in his essay 'The Medusa's Head', it has become somewhat automatic to read these images as symbols of castration. Charles Bernheimer has argued that the castration fantasy is a product of the decadent imagination in European culture at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ It is thus possible to interpret the function of the severed head as a continuation of its function in earlier decades. But unlike earlier depictions of headlessness, images of the severed head in *Les Vampires* had a significance beyond that of castration: that of the father separated from his family, through absence or death. For all its (phantasmatic) phallic significance, the severed head was more closely associated with absent fathers at this moment in history. The castration fantasy (the reading of the presence of female genitalia as the 'absence' of male genitalia) constructs the loss, through a phantasmatic wounding, of something that never existed except as a narcissistic projection (giving a phallus with one hand and taking it away with the other). On the contrary, the loss of fathers and sons in the war was the result of very real wounding, the very real slaughter underlying these images of severed heads. The fear of castration actually covers over, obscures a deeper fear. Freud wrote his Medusa essay in 1922, when contemplation of the rather hypothetical prospect of castration could detract from all-too-real encounters in the course of daily life with any of the 3.2 million Austrian war wounded.

The castration complex is thus itself a fetish, a substitute that both disavows an absence (the absence of men slaughtered at war), and acts as a memorial to that absence. A fetish erects a phantom limb where there was none in the first place, a memorial reminding us of nothing. This is precisely the function of the castration fantasy. As Freud observed that

¹² Jean-Louis Leutrat, *Vie des Fantômes: Le Fantastique au cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma), p. 39.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Charles Bernheimer, 'Fetishism and decadence: Salome's severed heads', in Emily Apter and William Pietz (eds), *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1993).

15 Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 65.

16 Francis Lacassin, *Maître des lions et des vampires: Louis Feuillade* (Paris: Pierre Bordas et fils, 1995), p. 215.

17 For details about the making of the serial, see Jacques Champreux, 'Les Films à épisodes de Louis Feuillade', in Jacques Champreux and Alain Carou (eds), *Louis Feuillade*, special issue of 1895, October 2000, especially pp. 133–42.

18 Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (New York: Zone Books, 1996), pp. 73–6.

sometimes a cigar is just a cigar, I am arguing that, on one level, a severed head is 'just' a severed head – or a severed arm or leg – and nothing less. It is thus my contention that what Kaja Silverman calls 'the phallic legacy'¹⁵ is undermined in Feuillade's serial not because its acephalic imagery symbolizes castration, but because castration is merely a decoy for another loss that cannot be acknowledged overtly.

The status of castration as a fetish is reinforced by the logic of substitution that drives the serial's narrative, and that also points directly to the war. This logic of substitution manifests itself in two ways. When Feuillade began shooting *Les Vampires* in the summer of 1915, he was severely limited in his choice of actors and technicians because the majority of male personnel had been mobilized. Those who had not yet fought would soon be called away: several characters thus met untimely demises when the actors playing them (such as, for example, Louis Leubas, who played the vampire leader Satanás) had to return to battle.¹⁶ Immune from conscription were Edouard Mathé, an Australian citizen, Jean Ayme, who was Swiss (but whose character was killed off anyway when the actor demanded a pay rise), and of course Musidora, whose gender made her a safe bet (though only relatively so: she was actually Feuillade's second choice for the role of Irma Vep, and was only called in when the first actress hired to play the part got pregnant).¹⁷

For very pragmatic reasons, then, the logic of substitution underwrites the prevalence of impersonation in the serial. If these vampires do not suck blood and have no use for fangs, coffins, graveyards, castles or even immortality, they do display a predilection for inhabiting other characters' bodies. For example, we learn at the end of the first episode that the Grand Vampire has killed an old friend of our hero's father and taken over his body, helpfully providing an explanatory note: 'The real Dr. Nox, whose personality I have taken over, is dead, assassinated by me'. Meanwhile, the Grand Vampire has already been using an alias to impersonate the Comte de Noirmoutier, so his impersonation of Doctor Nox is already a double impersonation. Between them, the various members of the vampire gang, and, less frequently, the good guys Philippe and Mazamette, impersonate some twenty different people, sometimes more than one at a time. In episode six Irma Vep herself is impersonated by a servant working for a couple of American thieves who are in turn impersonating other Americans. The rash of substitutions effected at the level of the diegesis thus mirrors the substitutions among the actors necessitated by the war. It is perhaps no wonder that, immediately after the war, psychiatrists identified a new class of paranoid delusion, 'l'illusion des sosies' or Capgras' syndrome, in which patients traumatized by the loss of loved ones imagined that even survivors had been killed or spirited away and replaced by imposters who inhabited their bodies.¹⁸

The episode that contains the most instances of impersonation is the sixth, 'Les Yeux qui fascinent'. This episode, with its proliferation of substitutions, provides a particularly apt illustration of the process

whereby the loss of life is transformed filmically into the fetishization of castration. Near the beginning of the episode we learn that the fascinating eyes of the title belong to the vampires' rival in crime, Moréno, who has the power to hypnotize people simply by staring at them. But this episode also suggests that there is another kind of eye with a similar capacity to objectify those on whom it fixes its gaze: that of the movie camera. Immediately after the scene in which Moréno hypnotizes his housekeeper, we see Philippe and Mazamette seated in a cinema. They are watching a newsreel entitled *L'Assassinat du Notaire, L'Enquête dans la Forêt de Fontainebleau/The Murder of the Notary, and Investigation in the Fontainebleau Forest*. The illusion of a film is created by means of live actors on a stage before the cinema audience, surrounded by a rectangular frame, meant to be the screen. In a *mise-en-abîme* effect, in which we see an audience watching people who are themselves engaged in looking at something, the audience sees a small group of people, including Irma Vep in male drag, intently examining the ground beneath them. We learn that the vampire gang, returning to the scene of their most recent crime to remove any incriminating evidence, has been caught on camera by a roving news reporter. A movie camera then makes a second appearance at the end of the episode, brandished by one of the journalists who are interviewing Mazamette in his home after he has been given a big reward for solving a crime. Mazamette shows the reporters his mortician's top hat displayed in a glass case on his mantelpiece, announcing: 'In front of this modest headpiece that I once wore, I proclaim that although vice may not always be punished, Virtue is always rewarded'.

Between these two references to filmmaking, this episode of *Les Vampires* displays all the hallmarks of the voyeuristic process of 'ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control, and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness'.¹⁹ In addition to the 'moral' involving punishment and reward that Mazamette trots out for the benefit of the reporters to whom he tells his life story, we are also presented with another morality tale. While Irma Vep is sent to search the hotel rooms of an American couple suspected of harboring a treasure map, attention shifts to her accomplice, the Grand Vampire posing as the Comte de Kerlor (whose son Irma poses as before slipping back into her body-hugging vampire suit). The Grand Vampire distracts the hotel guests with a story about his great-grandfather in Napoleon's army in Spain, which he reads from an account he has written entitled 'Les Aventures de Gloire et d'Amour du Capitaine de Kerlor, racontée par le Colonel Comte de Kerlor son arrière petit-fils/The glorious and romantic adventures of Captain Kerlor, as told by Colonel Count Kerlor, his great grandson'. We then see footage shot on location of a soldier ordering a Spanish woman to feed and water his horse. The woman, whose husband and brother have been killed by the French, unleashes a bull on the soldier. The bull chases the Frenchman, who does battle with the animal, finally stabbing it with his

¹⁹ Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity*, p. 205.

sword. The bull dies, but, an intertitle informs us, 'the Kerlors are not the kind of people who would take revenge on a woman'.

The incongruity of this interlude, apparently inserted because Feuillade had already shot the Spanish footage for another aborted film, had a surrealist appeal (literally – it was fondly remembered by several of the young poets and artists who would later become Surrealists and in whose work bullfighting was a recurring theme). Film analysts have commented on the apparent arbitrariness of this sequence, citing it as an example of Feuillade's 'automatic filmmaking', a precursor to the Surrealists' automatic writing.²⁰ Ado Kyrrou credits Feuillade with the creation of 'collage cinématographique', prefiguring the pictorial collages of Max Ernst.²¹ Another explanation for the illogical nature of the sequence, however, can be found in the very structure of trauma, in which, according to E. Ann Kaplan, 'images are repeated but without meaning: they do not have a clear beginning, middle and end. Rather they erupt into cinematic space, unheralded in the story as in an individual's consciousness'.²² When read as a symptom of trauma, the bullfighting scene enables the Napoleonic War to stand in for the war taking place at the time the serial was made; it also displays a certain coherence that is in keeping with the logic of the episode and, ultimately, of the whole serial.

The sequence's narrative drive is provided by a woman's act of betrayal towards a man, which provokes a desire for punishment. This scenario prefigures the American woman's betrayal of her husband to the police, who arrest him and give the substantial reward for locating the criminal to Mazamette, which prompts the barrage of reporters who film his moralistic account of the events leading up to the arrest. Earlier in the episode, we see the American man on horseback arguing with his wife, who is standing beside him and whose look of petulance provides the first sign of the rebellion that will result in her 'betrayal' of him. The bull sequence begins with an almost identically staged shot of the Spanish woman standing beside the horse-riding French officer, with a look of defiance on her face.

The desire for revenge, provoked by these apparent acts of feminine betrayal, are always gallantly suppressed, as in the examples cited above, as well as in the last episode of the serial, in which Irma is finally killed off, but *by a woman*, thus fulfilling a male revenge fantasy, without actually incurring masculine guilt. Indeed, the justification for these acts of revenge often falters upon even cursory examination. For example, the American woman's act of 'betrayal' consists of opening the door when the police knock, but the role she plays in her husband's arrest is questionable when we consider that her husband, named Raphael Norton but posing as a man named Horatio Werner, has already raised suspicion about his identity by neglecting to remove his large insignia ring engraved prominently with the initials 'R.N.' Nonetheless, this man is shown making a strangling motion directed at his wife when he is finally arrested, implying that she is entirely to blame for his fate. Similarly, although it is implied that the Spanish woman's act of loosing the bull on

20 Lacassin, *Pour une Contre-histoire du cinéma*, pp. 174–5.

21 Ado Kyrrou, *Le Surréalisme au cinéma* (Paris: Editions Ramsay, 1985), p. 55.

22 E. Ann Kaplan, 'Melodrama, cinema and trauma', *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2 (Summer 2001), Special Debate: Trauma and Screen Studies, p. 204.

the fictional Comte de Kerlor's grandfather ought really to be a punishable offense (were the Kerlors not such a noble and gentlemanly breed), we in fact learn that the woman is doing no more than avenging the deaths of her father and brother at the hands of the French. Irma Vep, too, undergoes a similar transformation from victim to perpetrator in this episode. In the penultimate scene, after the American thieves have been arrested but before Mazamette is visited by journalists, we see Irma spending a little quality time with her new lover, Moréno, the arch rival of the vampire gang. No longer in male drag, but instead wearing a woman's suit inspired by men's fashions, complete with fitted blazer and necktie, she writes, under Moréno's hypnotic influence, a confession of all her crimes. In the original script for this episode, however, the letter that Irma writes is the following: 'I am a foundling. I was named Irma Vep because this name is an anagram of Vampire. The man who raised me taught me to steal and kill. He used to exercise an overwhelming influence on me, but I'm no longer afraid of him.'²³ In the trajectory from script to screen, Irma's account of victimization is transformed into a confession of crime. Moréno seems satisfied by Irma's confession, and reinforces his domination of her by ordering her to murder her former lover, the Grand Vampire, which she does, and for which she receives an embrace.

Musidora herself referred to her character's behaviour in a mocking tone that underscored Irma's exaggerated culpability: 'I confess . . . these are my crimes. This morning, I shot and killed my former lover, the Great Vampire, played by the elegant actor Jean Ayme, in order to spend my life with a more attractive bandit'.²⁴ The guilt projected onto this female character is the guilt of survivors, of men who did not fight in the war, or those who did fight and lived to tell about it. Irma Vep narrowly escapes death in several episodes of *Les Vampires* so that viewers might have the continued pleasure of watching her undergo yet another near miss. Here is Musidora again describing a typical day's work: 'Yesterday, a 52-coach train went over my body at great speed, with infernal clattering of wheels and great gusts of wind. I'm not in any hurry to repeat *that* performance'.²⁵ The 'crime' of which most women were implicitly deemed guilty in wartime was not that of castration, but rather that of not having had to risk their lives in combat.

In film, both crime and punishment are often displaced onto the female body. These scenarios of feminine misbehaviour and masculine desire for punishment rehearse the voyeuristic process of assigning blame to women for sexual difference: of imagining, in other words, that they are former men who have brought about their own fall from grace. This phantasmatic vision of women as modified men is part and parcel of the castration fantasy, and is figured in the image of Irma Vep in male drag. This instance of feminine cross-dressing is a disavowal of her difference, covering over an absence with a surface sheen as distracting as that created by the same character's sleek, shiny body stocking, or the glass case in which Mazamette keeps his mortician's hat. The hat itself is a

²³ Translated by the author from *Les Vampires* scenario (FEU), Bibliothèque du Film, Paris. The version of *Les Vampires* on which this essay is based was restored by Jacques Champreux, Feuillade's grandson, who reconstructed the intertitles after consultation with Musidora and others directly involved in the making of the film. See Régis Bastide et al., *Louis Feuillade* (Perpignan: Cahiers de la Cinémathèque, 1987).

²⁴ Musidora, *Souvenirs sur Pierre Louÿs* (Muizon/Éditions A l'Ecart, 1984), p. 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

26 It is almost as though she is aware of the links between the image of the severed head and the objectification of women in film when, in the fourth episode, in response to an invitation from an elderly man to accompany him to the movies, Irma stabs him in the head with a hatpin. On the cinema bill: 'Le Grand Couronné—Documentaire d'actualités/The great crowned head—newsreel'.

metonymy of death contained safely on Mazamette's mantelpiece, just as the castration fantasy itself covers over, with a dazzling theoretical gloss, the reality of death on the battlefields.²⁶

The cut-up, or episodic, nature of the serial form itself reinforces the fetishistic emphasis on fragmentation in the titles of the two episodes on which I have been focusing so far, 'La tête coupée' and 'Les Yeux qui fascinent'. In addition to evoking the recently developed film technique of the close-up, the bodily part-objects that pervade the serial suggest the carnage being created on not-so-distant battlefields, from which so many fathers (and sons and brothers) would not be returning. But one instance of dismemberment, or near-dismemberment, which occurs during the reunion between Mazamette and his son Eustache in the eighth episode, attempts to resist the disintegration of the nuclear family alluded to throughout the rest of the serial. When the rambunctious little boy is expelled from school for bad behaviour, his father initially greets him with stern disapproval, but this soon dissolves into paternal affection. Mazamette immediately includes the boy in his crime-fighting capers, and the two set out in matching outfits, ready for adventure. After helping his father locate the hideout of the Grand Vampire and narrowly avoiding the exploding hat-bomb, Eustache poses as a street urchan begging for money door-to-door. The boy takes out a gun and aims at the vampire, but misses, and ends up shooting his father in the nose. Despite their mishaps, Eustache and Mazamette have nevertheless managed to get the Grand Vampire arrested, and, overjoyed, Mazamette leans down to kiss his son, but his injured nose gets in the way. The boy looks straight at the camera and laughs (this rupture of the diegesis evoking the child actor Bout d'Zan's background in vaudeville), clasping his hands together in a triumphant gesture. The important thing, though, about this exchange between father and son, is that it does not end here. Later in the episode, Mazamette assumes the paternal role towards his son that Philippe has until now taken with him. Showing Eustache a newspaper article declaring the demise of the vampire gang and warning him, 'that's what happens to people who don't behave in school', Mazamette leans over to kiss his son again, repeating his earlier failed attempt, once again hurting his nose and provoking uproarious laughter from the boy. But now Mazamette makes one more attempt, this time succeeding in kissing the boy, who finally responds with affection. Mazamette's shooting by his son, though a near-patricide, does not, ultimately, support an Oedipal interpretation, and does not, finally, prevent Mazamette from asserting his parental role.

In addition to Mazamette's reunion with his son, the serial's final episodes also attempt to reaffirm the integrity of the nuclear family, with Philippe's marriage, the announcement of Mazamette's engagement to a widowed housekeeper and the marriage of Irma Vep. The reinstatement of the nuclear family, headed by a man, staves off the acephalic threat, pushing back the nagging suspicion (according to Silverman) of a 'lack at the heart of all subjectivity'²⁷ or, at the very least, of the lack

27 Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 4.

of order and legitimacy in a world devastated by the senselessness of war. The final episode's title, 'Les noces sanglantes/The bloody nuptials', while referring explicitly to the excesses of Irma's bohemian wedding celebration and its culmination in her death, can also be read in relation to the traditional marriage convention's demand for a bloody sheet, as a confirmation of paternity, in which the bride's virginity is affirmed at the very moment of its dissolution.

But even these insistent images of familial cohesion cannot entirely obscure the spectre haunting the serial, the very present absence buried deep within it. As 'in mechanized warfare, machine-gun operators kill without seeing any corpses', so it is possible to do another kind of shooting – of film – without showing these corpses.²⁸ When Feuillade's serial was made, the term 'vampirisme' referred to 'a perverse attraction for corpses'.²⁹ A serial about vampires provided a home for these cadavres, a way of mourning them, without having to refer to them explicitly, as Mazamette's career as a mortician evokes the mourning that cannot otherwise be performed in the film. The serial thus incorporates the dead, in both the usual and the psychoanalytic senses of the term, encrypting them with the code of castration, the better to bury them in glass cases, hatboxes or safes. Abraham and Torok describe the fetish as '*the symbol of what cannot be symbolized*'.³⁰ Indeed, castration here both signals and obscures the death that dare not speak its name.

²⁸ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 131.

²⁹ This usage dates from 1891 and is cited in Hervé Joubert-Laurencin, 'Quand le dessin animé vampirise le cinéma', in *Les Vampires, Colloque de Cerisy* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993), p. 283.

³⁰ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, vol. 1, trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 153; original emphasis.

'Just play yourself, "Maggie Cheung": *Irma Vep*, rethinking transnational stardom and unthinking national cinemas

DALE HUDSON

Produced shortly after the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), *Irma Vep* (Olivier Assayas, 1996) addresses certain debates about the future of French national cinema in response to increased transnational film production, distribution, exhibition and reception. As a film about filmmaking in an era when first-world conceptions of 'film auteurs' and 'national cinemas' have long since been destabilized by the complexities of postcolonial nationalisms, television coproductions, and unprecedented global flows of people and capital, the narrative of *Irma Vep* pivots on the introduction of a star from Hong Kong into Paris to play the leading role in a remake of one of the city's (and nation's) most iconic silent film serial heroes. Maggie Cheung plays the role of 'Maggie' who is both hired for, and later fired from, the leading role of Irma Vep in a television remake of *Les Vampires* (Louis Feuillade, 1915–16), precisely because she is 'not French'. In the light of nationalist mythologies that surround Feuillade's serial and Musidora's performance of the character of Irma Vep in the serial – at least among cinéphiles after the film's restoration and video release in tandem with the 1995 centenary of French cinema – it is not surprising that casting Maggie as Irma Vep should incite debate and reflection. Some of the French characters press Maggie to comment on French cinema from an outsider's perspective in order to validate their own idiosyncratic beliefs.

Other characters, however, are profoundly disturbed that 'une Chinoise' should be cast in the iconic role of Irma Vep.

Irma Vep explores the shifting terrain of cosmopolitan privilege, especially as eurocentrism's political and economic underpinnings have begun to be eroded by changes in the world economy. The film positions Maggie as a cosmopolitan subject, a transnational star who is capable of wrapping a film in Hong Kong one day, flying to Paris for another project the next day, then, when that project unexpectedly ends for her, jetting to New York and Los Angeles for meetings with directors and agents about future projects. However, the film also points to the reassertion of ethnocentric nationalism during a pre-9/11 era when nationalism was purportedly dissolving into the postnationalism of globalization. Other internationally recognizable stars in the film include French actors Jean-Pierre Léaud, Nathalie Boutefeu and Alex Descas, as well as Armenian Canadian actor Arsinée Khanjian. Questions of national identity in the film's metropolitan representation of Paris, however, centre on Cheung's character, pointing to selective racialization as an exclusionist strategy in nation state-based nationalisms. *Irma Vep* parodies racism in western cinema by pointing to the resilience of ethnocentric notions of national identity within France's official system of citizenship (loosely, 'nationality') based on ascription.

Commissioned to direct the remake of *Les Vampires*, the character René Vidal Léaud asks his star Maggie to keep her performance simple, not to *act* so much as to *be herself*, echoing Assayas's own direction that Cheung 'just play herself' in his film. *Irma Vep*'s narrative invites comparisons with 'real life', unfolding as a *mise en abîme* (or 'Chinese box' to use, ironically, the English-language expression) that suggests that the film's narrative may be revealing fictionalized conditions of the film's own production. Whether Vidal serves as Assayas's ventriloquist dummy or as a satirical representation of the typical auteur of a certain generation of French national cinema is perhaps less relevant a decade after the film's initial theatrical release, than the questions about cinematic projections of national identity and transnational stardom posed by the direction to 'play' oneself. Much like the tenor of debates on audiovisual materials at the WTO negotiations, where terms such as 'free market' and 'cultural exception' take on nationally specific meanings, *Irma Vep* centres on irreconcilable differences in the interpretation of everyday terms concerning the relationship between cinema and nation, particularly cinema's role in the preservation or renovation of the French nation.

Irma Vep has most frequently been discussed in terms of the desire to make 'new and original' films under the insupportable weight of French cinematic history. The film's dialogue and images evoke the 'golden ages' of the Lumières and Méliès, the Gaumont studio, poetic realism, and the new wave, suggesting an elitist construction of French cinema, canonical films that purportedly express a sense of national identity despite differences in their resonance with audiences. As Naomi Greene

1 Naomi Greene, *Landscapes of Loss: The National Past in Postwar French Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 12.

points out about post-1968 French cinema, ‘Representations of a “golden age” are, implicitly and explicitly, laments for a less than golden present’.¹ In *Irma Vep*, this representation of the past relies less upon mimesis than upon citation and mediation. Characters fiercely debate French cinema with opinions differing as to the direction that it should take into its second century. The costume designer Zoé (Nathalie Richard) prefers ‘personal films’ to remakes, questioning Vidal’s logic to make what has already been made. Though parroting clichéd judgments of Parisian cinéphiles, Zoé finds Hollywood films to be vacuous, if appealing for their high production values. The cinematographer Markus (Bernard Nissile) finds that the ‘le cinéma militant’ of the 1960s, whose promise was to ‘free people’, retains its urgency. His wife, Mireille (Bulle Ogier), praises the VCR for its ability to free her from the monotony of *Les Vampires* by permitting her to fast forward through a video copy of the serial. For other characters, defining a national cinema in terms of its past productions, particularly ones that turned their gaze inward to personal and domestic issues, is an exercise in solipsism.

More inclined to define French cinema in terms of the films that are actually being consumed by French audiences, during an interview with Maggie on Vidal’s set a young journalist (Antoine Basler) decries the French government for continuing to financially support a French intellectual cinema made for elites. He believes that French filmmakers should emulate the popular successes of action-adventure films from Hollywood and Hong Kong, particularly the hybrid work of John Woo, which Maggie dismisses as ‘too masculine’ in a diplomatic appeal for cinematic plurality. The journalist’s comments parody complaints by some contemporary French filmmakers that French film critics have attempted to sabotage the local film industry in their unadulterated praise for Hollywood. More significantly, the journalist learns (or perhaps confirms) from Maggie that French cinema is not well known in Hong Kong. Maggie has seen a few films with ‘big stars’ – Alain Delon and Catherine Deneuve – but otherwise knows little of French cinema, apparently because it does not export well to Hong Kong. Although the journalist’s vision of French cinema is radically different from the visions of the costume designer and cinematographer, each conceives cinema as working to fulfill the particular needs of French audiences, either by distinguishing itself from other cinemas or by emulating them. The inward direction of a French national cinema for the French nation is hardly surprising, given that Vidal’s commission is for television. The remake of *Les Vampires* is targeted, presumably, at domestic audiences in an effort to reintroduce them to their (France’s) cultural patrimony during a period when film audiences were, however belatedly, being recognized as plural and culturally diverse.

As with the differences in opinion among Vidal’s crew, critical reception of *Irma Vep* and its narrative about the remaking of *Les Vampires* has been divided. One critic interprets Vidal’s ‘radical reinterpretation of *Les Vampires* for a contemporary audience’ as ironic

- 2 Léaud portrayed Antoine Doinel in *Les 400 Coups* / *The 400 Blows* (François Truffaut, 1959). He became an icon of the 'new wave' of French cinema. Like Truffaut and Godard, Assayas wrote for *Cahiers du cinéma* before writing scenarios for André Téchiné and later writing and directing his own films.
- 3 Paul Sutton, 'Remaking the remake: *Irma Vep* (Assayas, 1996)', in Phil Powrie (ed.), *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 71.
- 4 Chris Darke, 'Irma Vep' (review), *Sight and Sound*, vol. 7, no. 3 (March 1997), p. 52.

- 5 Susan Hayward, 'National cinemas and the body politic', in Elizabeth Ezra and Sue Harris (eds), *France in Focus: Film and National Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 100; Alan Williams, 'Introduction', in Alan Williams (ed.), *Film and Nationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), pp. 1–22.
- 6 Steve Neale, 'Art cinema as institution', *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1981), pp. 11–38.

insofar as Vidal stands in the place of an 'apparently classic auteur', portrayed by Jean-Pierre Léaud, himself an icon of the new wave,² concluding that Vidal is 'paralyzed by the legacy of Feuillade and by his desire to recapture a lost moment of cinematic origin'.³ Another critic observes: 'Where Vidal is creatively exhausted by his fidelity to the past, Assayas can be an urgent force. *Irma Vep* doesn't work out its mourning for cinema with the romantic nostalgia of Godard's *Le Mépris* or *Passion*, it's more like the Mexican Day of the Dead: remembrance as an act of celebration.'⁴ Vidal is reluctant to accept the project of a television remake of *Les Vampires* but paralysis, exhaustion and celebration do not, at least for me, adequately address the questions posed by Vidal's more 'controversial' departure from Feuillade's model: the casting of a Hong Kong superstar in the leading role of Irma Vep. The character of Maggie in tandem with the film's copious references to French cinematic history prompts viewers to unthink what they know about French national cinema and reconsider it in a global context.

Assayas's playful invocation of France's cinematic history in *Irma Vep* calls attention to the instability of 'French national cinema' as an enunciation of national identity. Even when audiences are posited as unified in their responses to films, the interplay of cinema and nation is complex and full of contradictions, so that the concept of 'national cinemas' is highly unstable. Although feature-length narrative films often circulate in the international marketplace, where they compete in film festivals and later receive theatrical and video release and commonly make use of international labour and multinational financing, such films are often conceived as promoting the exceptional 'values' of particular nations and thereby functioning as key components to national cinemas.⁵ The global and regional dominance of the commercial industries in Los Angeles, Mumbai and Hong Kong, as well as the Mexican and Egyptian commercial industries during their golden ages, generally shifts critical attention in theatrical exhibition to 'art cinema' as an equivalent to 'national cinema'. Steve Neale observes that the institution of art cinema 'always tends to involve a balance between a national aspect on one hand and an international aspect on the other'.⁶ Art films resonate with both local and overseas audiences, projecting a sense of national exceptionalism, so that audiences come to expect certain features from 'French cinema', which helps them to distinguish it from 'Iranian cinema' or 'Thai cinema' or 'Argentine cinema'. Neale's argument that 'entertainment' films erase national differences is perhaps less applicable in the light of increased transnational filmmaking and distribution since the publication of his article in the early 1980s. Many Bollywood masalas and Hong Kong action-adventure films acquire the status of art films among non-diasporic audiences in Europe and North America, if not among local audiences, pointing to the historical and cultural determinants of distinctions between 'art' and 'entertainment'. Alongside traditional art-film fare and Hollywood 'auteur' and 'indie'

productions, such films often appear in international film festivals, venues that highlight notions of national exceptionalism.

More comprehensively, Andrew Higson suggests that the concept of national cinema should be approached from a variety of perspectives, including economic terms of production; textual analyses of subject matter, sensibility or style; exhibition or consumption-based approaches; and critical appraisal, particularly in journals and universities.⁷ Stephen Crofts discusses the ways in which nationalism emerges in the different cinema production and marketing practices of Hollywood, Europe, Third Cinema, totalitarian states and others.⁸ The collapse of the USSR and consequent reordering of the world, however, has not resulted in a homogenized global culture. More recently, Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie argue that film scholarship should redefine, rather than avoid, the concepts of nationhood and nationality, so as to identify 'their continued, although changing pertinence to film studies'.⁹ Similarly, Allan Williams makes clear: 'We would be mistaken to assume that the recent, intense debate about "globalization" (both in mass media, and in economic and cultural relations in general) means that the relations between cinema and nationalism have only recently become destabilized. To the contrary, cinema and nation have always had shifting, problematic functions with regard to one another and to the larger arena of world culture.'¹⁰ *Irma Vep* questions the viability of French national cinema in a global era by conjoining a national icon (the character of Irma Vep) and a transnational star (Maggie) within the context of French cinematic history.

Irma Vep's evocation of a very selective history of French cinema, then, becomes an object of Assayas's social satire of the French industry. Significant among the exclusions to the representation of French cinema is comedy, which has often been called 'the French national genre'. Since comedy is contingent on an understanding of specific cultural and linguistic codes, comedies generally do not receive the international distribution of other popular genre films, such as action-adventures.¹¹ *Irma Vep* is as much a French comedy as it is an international art film. The film's comedy emerges from the confusion of cultural and linguistic codes as the French film crew interacts with its Hong Kong star, as well as the earnestness with which members of Vidal's crew debate the specific direction of the project and the general direction of French cinema. For many of the characters, the future of French cinema would seem to hinge upon Vidal's remake of *Les Vampires*.

The patriotic objections among Vidal's crew to his casting decision extend to questioning his very sanity, calling attention to the history of cinema in France and its historical projection of French nationhood. Cinema was, after all, invented in France. Susan Hayward argues that 'the term "national" shifts in meaning according to the social, political or economic mutations or pressures, and that this shifting also affects questions of cinematic style'.¹² French cinema defined itself as 'national' by virtue of its dominance of the 'world' market before World War I, but

7 Andrew Higson, 'The concept of national cinema', *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 4 (1989), pp. 36–46.

8 Stephen Crofts, 'Reconceptualizing national cinema/s', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1993), pp. 49–67.

9 Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie, 'Introduction', in Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (eds), *Cinema and Nation* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), p. 2.

10 Alan Williams, 'Introduction', in Alan Williams (ed.), *Film and Nationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 1.

11 Franco Moretti makes this point about Hollywood comedies in the global market in his article 'Planet Hollywood', *New Left Review*, vol. 9 (May–June 2001), pp. 90–101.

12 Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 5–64.

13 Ibid.

14 Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), p. 101. Building on Benedict Anderson's arguments they note that, while novels are generally read in solitude, films are generally viewed collectively in a 'symbolic gathering of the nation'. Of course, as they point out, a collective viewing will have divergent readings. Moreover, viewing practices differ across cultures, especially since the advent of video technologies. If nationalism is an ongoing debate, then so are national cinemas.

15 Robert Stam, *Film Theory: an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 92.

French cinema constructed itself as 'national' *in opposition* to Hollywood during the 1920s and 1950s and *in response* to European integration during the 1990s.¹³ Technological and industrial shifts between the silent and sound eras suggest other contours to articulations of French national cinema, so that a certain irony emerges when the 'national' character of French cinema is considered from cinema's birth in the 1890s to its centenary in the 1990s. As a dominant producer of silent films, French cinema projected a hegemonic and, quite literally, colonizing image of the French nation based on nonlinguistic signs. Costumes, sets, props, hairstyles, facial expression, bodily gestures and simple narratives were considered capable of transcending cultural—national—linguistic boundaries, so that the mere translation of intertitles or the substitution of accompanying music was invested with the ability to communicate across cultures and languages — across nations. International audiences, even in some of the industry's major competitors, including the pre-Hollywood USA, presumably saw French films as 'just films'. More overtly, silent films served as a means of indoctrinating colonial audiences as part of France's 'civilizing mission'. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argued more than a decade ago, cinema is 'ideally suited to relay the projected narratives of nation and empire'.¹⁴ It is hardly a surprise, as Stam points out, that eurocentric efforts to lay claim to cinematic technique and style, such as structuralism's universalizing strategies and the neoromanticism of auteur theories, should emerge after World War II contemporaneously with the basis for 'unthinking eurocentrism' in theories of a Third Cinema.¹⁵

Although French film continued to buttress the colonial matrix even after the formal independence of its colonies, France's official policy towards its film industries changed in response to shifts in economic and political power affecting film distribution and exhibition after World War I. Faced with a series of unidirectional trade agreements initiated by the USA, such as the Blum–Byrnes Agreements and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) during the 1940s and 1950s, the French industry came to rely on French-language dialogue as a means of attracting local audiences by offering a specifically French cinema. Emphasis shifted somewhat from national language (French) to continental culture (European) as discussions for European integration proceeded, yet French cinema continues to define itself internationally in terms of the legacies of the golden age of international 'art cinema' in the 1950s and 1960s. In its negotiations with the USA, France demanded cinematic pluralism, evoking the 'cultural exception' which would protect French films from engulfment in the home market by the Hollywood product of multinational entertainment corporations. The role of silence and spoken language in French cinema, then, is central to France's cinematic history. Indeed, many critics have argued that the advent of sound contributed not only to a new standardization of world film

production, but also to tighter controls over national film production through international copyright law.

More specific to *Irma Vep* and the film's narrative about a remake of *Les Vampires*, the very definition of a 'French film' changed with the increase in response to EEC (European Economic Community) regulations that dictated that films produced in France by subsidiaries of multinational production companies, particularly US-based ones, were to be considered 'French' and, subsequently, could benefit from financial aid from the state.¹⁶ Whether measured in terms of technology or talent, production or reception, cinema's collaborative processes are exceedingly difficult to separate according to notions of distinct nations. 'Whilst cinema may reproduce the myth of a unified nation', writes Hayward, 'the greater bulk of its productions will not be able to do so'.¹⁷ Vidal's decision to make *Les Vampires* with a Hong Kong actor in the leading role would appear to represent an unacceptable compromise in the opinions of his crew.

For Maggie to play Irma Vep, then, is controversial and requires acceptance of changes in the global film market since Feuillade's serial. Irma Vep's privileged position in the national imaginary (or, at least, the national imaginary as it is conceived by cinéastes) is reasserted in *Irma Vep* through constant articulation and re-articulation by the film's characters. In *Les Vampires*, Irma Vep is a mistress to, and strategist for, the male leaders of an underground criminal gang calling itself 'les vampires'. Both Irma Vep and Musidora (itself a stage name for Jeanne Roques) functioned as a national icon when the film was shot during World War I and into the interwar period. Irma Vep and Musidora came to represent in the French national imaginary a sexualized transgression of the official order of Paris that had fallen twice to German occupation. The two figures inspired the admiration of generations of French artists seeking to shock 'the bourgeois'. Louis Aragon famously called Musidora 'the tenth muse' and a group of feminist filmmakers adopted her name in the late 1960s.¹⁸ Given the historical significance of Musidora and Irma Vep, it is not surprising that Vidal's decision to cast a non-Parisian, moreover a non-French, star meets resistance from his crew and critics in *Irma Vep*'s representation of contemporary Paris. Some reviews of *Irma Vep* have even interpreted Vidal's casting decision as antinationalistic, as pointed out by one critic: 'To remake *Les Vampires* is like attempting to blow the same soap bubble twice. To remake it with a Chinese actress in the lead is to blow the soap directly into the eyes of the French nation, which is already smarting from too many slights to its patrimony'.¹⁹ Indeed, much of the film relays an apparent consensus that French cinema is no longer what it once may have been.

In his arguments that cinema is a 'national projection', Jean-Michel Frodon finds a peculiar paradox in which nostalgia for the past replaces efforts for a construction of the future in French cinema.²⁰ Generally based on canonical literary works ('presold properties' in the language of Hollywood) or fictionalized reconstructions of history, heritage films

¹⁶ Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema*, p. 28. Hayward cites the potential for subsidiaries of foreign-based companies to benefit from the taxes levied on all films exhibited in France, the proceeds of which are placed in the 'Fonds de soutien' to aid French film production.

¹⁷ Susan Hayward, 'National cinemas and the body politic', p. 97.

¹⁸ Musidora is the stage name for cabaret performer turned film actress, writer and director, Jeanne Roques. The stage name is said come from Théophile Gautier's 'Fortunio', in which the young heroine is a romantic courtesan who dies of poison, having pricked herself on a pin found in the wallet of a man she loves. 'Musidora', in Philippe d'Hugues and Michel Marmin (eds), *Le cinéma français: le meurt* (Paris: Alfas, 1986), p. 106.

¹⁹ Stuart Klawans, 'Irma Vep' (review), *The Nation*, vol. 264, no. 19 (19 May 1997), p. 36.

²⁰ Jean-Michel Frodon, *La Projection nationale : cinéma et nation* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1998), p. 91.

- 21 *Les Vampires* might even be considered a presold property. The scripts, written by Feuillade (and perhaps also by Musidora), were transcribed and published as cinéromans in *Le Matin* and provincial newspapers prior to the cinematic release of the ten segments, so that audiences would know the plot before they watched the film. Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915–1929* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 72. The serial itself holds important historical significance insofar as it became 'the marketing strategy' to attract French audiences and to counter the increasing popularity of US productions during the 1910s. Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema*, p. 94.
- 22 Phil Powrie, *French Film in the 1980s: Nostalgia and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 13. Ginette Vincendeau has commented that French heritage films do 'not [...] present a rosy view of the past'. Ginette Vincendeau, 'Introduction', in Ginette Vincendeau (ed.), *Film/Literature/Heritage: a Sight and Sound Reader* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), p. xix.
- 23 Catherine Portuges, 'Le colonial féminin: women directors interrogate French cinema', in Dina Sherzer (ed.), *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism: Perspectives from the French and Francophone World* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 94.
- 24 Carrie Tarr, 'French cinema and post-colonial minorities', in Alec G. Hargreaves and Mark McKinney (eds), *Post-colonial Cultures in France* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 63.
- 25 Post-heritage films are usually discussed as more self-conscious and open to unconventional sexual and gender roles in comparison with heritage films.
- 26 I refer to Tom Gunning's 'The cinema of attraction: early film, its spectators, and the avant-garde', *Wide Angle*, vol. 8, nos 3–4 (1986), pp. 63–70.
- 27 Geoffrey O'Brien, 'Silent screams' (review of *Les Vampires*, *Irma Vep*,

would seem to embody this paradox.²¹ The appeal of heritage films, Phil Powrie observes, is related to 'the appropriate conditions for nostalgia' – perceptions of disillusionment and failure due to economic recessions and changes in governments – which prompt audiences to develop a taste for films that glorify a golden past.²² Catherine Portuges complicates this reading of French heritage cinema, arguing that the work of women filmmakers serves as an act of 'recovery' rather than of nostalgia.²³ Carrie Tarr agrees, calling the films, their European point of view notwithstanding, 'the most significant corrective to the French heritage view of empire within white-authored French cinema'.²⁴ Heritage cinema represents another 'golden age' in French cinema insofar as many of its films did well at the local and overseas box-office during the 1980s and 1990s. Although heritage films often adapt canonical literary texts, thereby establishing a sort of cultural heritage, the nationalism that they evoke is complicated by questions relating to international coproduction. One of the earliest heritage films, *Jean de Florette* (Claude Berri, 1986) for example, is a coproduction between France, Switzerland and Italy. The combination of high-profile actors with cultural icons in heritage films lends itself to ambivalent projections of nation suitable for international consumption.

The project of remaking *Les Vampires* for television suggests a larger project of reasserting national patrimony, a means of indoctrinating local audiences and introducing them to rediscovered canonical cinema. In some ways, the project evokes heritage or post-heritage cinema.²⁵ Basing a television film upon a crime serial from the age of silent cinema suggests an effort to reestablish contact with France's cultural heritage, however mixed emotions about it may be. Some of the characters find *Les Vampires* to be remote and uninteresting, yet none of them questions outright the place of the serial in French cinematic history. The very project of remaking *Les Vampires* evokes a generalized nostalgia for earlier periods in French cinematic history. Upon its initial theatrical release, *Les Vampires* was itself saturated in nostalgia, emphasizing its roots in 'the cinema of attraction' of the Lumières and Méliès.²⁶ *Les Vampires* was filmed at roughly the same time that D.W. Griffith released his racist 'masterpiece' *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), so that, as one journalist points out, 'the technical complexity of Griffith's film, with its intricate crosscutting and fluid changes of angle and distance, the sheer busyness of its mechanisms, was calculated to make movies like Feuillade's look primitive overnight'.²⁷ This built-in nostalgia would seem to inform Vidal's own approach to filmmaking. Whereas the history of French cinema is revealed entirely via videotapes played on television monitors, Vidal's rushes and the rough cut of the film are projected in a screening room. Vidal scratches the emulsion and its celluloid backing (or digitally generates the illusion of such scratching), evoking the materiality of film. 'Video and digital art emerge at the seams of film in *Irma Vep*', points out Grace An, 'as do many kinds of other hybrid (vampiric) forms, and they all carry a meditative critique of

and *The Mystery of Irma Vep*), *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 45, no. 21 (17 December 1998), p. 9.

- 28 Grace An, 'Par-asian screen women and film identities: the vampiric in Olivier Assayas's *Irma Vep*', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2000), p. 400.

the changing world around the French as they struggle to retain some semblance of an image or identity in which they can recognize themselves.²⁸ Even for a television film, Vidal calls attention to film as a particular medium in a way that would seem to confirm the peculiar paradox in French filmmaking that Frodon perceives.

In other ways, remakes are translations of original films to reflect the spirit of the current generation. To cite an example from India, another cinema that, like Hong Kong until the mid 1990s, historically remains immune to Hollywood penetration, *Devdas* (Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2002) dramatically changes the social mobility of women from earlier cinematic interpretations of Saratchandra Chatterjee's 1917 Bengali novel. (*Devdas* is also the first commercial Hindi film to be included among the official selection at the Cannes film festival, suggesting some measure of relief from Hollywood's frequent domination of the festival's international entries.) Apart from Vidal's apparent sexual attraction to his star, Vidal's casting decision seems almost progressive, perhaps a desperate measure to revitalize an industry which is portrayed in the film as being in crisis. *Irma Vep* opens with the production office staff frantically discussing financing for the project and much of the film documents long-standing fights between the crew. During the first day of Vidal's absence from the set, one of the actors rehearses with Maggie, lamenting that French cinema cannot be as organized and efficient as Japanese advertising production. During an interview a young journalist declares to Maggie that French cinema has been 'killed' by state interventions to maintain its difference from the unapologetically commercial cinema of Hollywood.

Unlike the French film industry, the Hong Kong industry maintained control over its local market, producing commercial films that topped the local and regional box offices even with the competition of Hollywood product. Moreover, Hong Kong's new-wave films have become competition to French films on the international art-film circuit. Wong Kar-Wai, for example, has been often discussed as a successor to Jean-Luc Godard, although his work in advertising and music videos reflects a different relationship to commercial and industrial filmmaking than Godard's work does. For Vidal to cast a star from Hong Kong as Irma Vep may be shocking to some audiences, including many among Vidal's film crew, yet it is important to remember that Vidal is associated with the French new wave. As a contemporary to new-wave filmmakers, Vidal would possibly have expressed the sort of ambivalence towards Hollywood that is evident in the work of Godard, François Truffaut and Eric Rohmer. Godard even cast, however ironically, the Hollywood actor Jane Fonda in *Tout va bien/Everything's O.K.* (1972), one of his 'groupe Dziga-Vertov' collaborations with Jean-Pierre Gorin. More pertinent to Vidal's possible inspirations and objectives in *Irma Vep*, however, is the revitalization of French cinema by the new-wave filmmakers who countered what Truffaut disparagingly termed the studio system's 'tradition of quality' by injecting the foreign conventions of Hollywood into French cinema. Godard even famously dedicated his first feature,

29 Steve Erikson, 'Making a connection between the cinema, politics and real life: an interview with Olivier Assayas', *Cinéaste*, vol. 22, no. 4 (1997), p. 8.

30 Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1986).

31 One history of French silent cinema suggests that Musidora is more compatible with our aesthetics than that of her own time. See 'Musidora', in Philippe d'Hugues and Michel Marmín (eds), *Le cinéma français: le meurt* (Paris: Alfas, 1986), p. 106.

32 Toby Miller, 'Hollywood and the world', in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 373.

À Bout de souffle/Breathless (1959), to Monogram Studios, a US producer of B-grade gangster films during the 1940s and 1950s. It should seem entirely logical, then, that Vidal would turn for inspiration to popular genre films from Hong Kong, as Hollywood itself was doing during the 1990s.

For Assayas, Vidal is remaking a cinematic 'archetype', the character of Irma Vep, not *Les Vampires*, so that *Irma Vep* becomes a film about 'how an archetype is discovered' and 'how it has to be remade for every generation'.²⁹ For Vidal, remaking an archetype for a new generation looks both back in time toward classical cinema, including classical Hollywood, and across space towards contemporary Hong Kong cinema. 'I think no French actress can be Irma Vep. After Musidora, it's impossible, it's blasphemy,' he explains to Maggie, as they watch clips of the Hong Kong martial-arts fantasy *Tong fong sam hop/The Heroic Trio* (Siu-tung Ching and Johnny To, 1992), a film in which Cheung actually stars alongside Michelle Yeoh and Anita Mui. Based on her performance in *The Heroic Trio*, which Vidal claims to have seen in 'a very cheap cinema in Marrakech', he assumes that Maggie is graceful and powerful, that she is playing herself (figure 1). As Richard Dyer points out, audiences actively create stars.³⁰ As part of *The Heroic Trio's* global audience, Vidal creates a star image for Maggie that differs from other star images of Maggie produced by other audiences, as well as the commercial film industry and the infamous tabloid industry in Hong Kong. Vidal believes that only Maggie can portray Irma Vep after Musidora, finding that Maggie has an equivalent 'beauty', 'mystery', 'magic' and 'strength' to Musidora – that Maggie is 'modern' like Musidora. If Musidora was modern in the sense that Paris was the modern city of the end of the nineteenth century in Vidal's mind, then Maggie is modern in the sense that Hong Kong was the modern city of the end of the twentieth century.³¹

In different ways, stars often embody or perform the aspirations and realities of national identity. Hollywood stars have always functioned to disseminate, both locally and internationally, notions of what it means to be 'American'. They advertise nationhood as did the '12,000 American Ambassadors', an expression for the annual number of Hollywood's export prints coined by producer Walter Wanger in the late 1930s, propagating 'the American way' and selling US-produced goods.³²



Figure 1
Maggie (Maggie Cheung) 'Playing herself' as she listens to director René Vidal's plan to remake *Les Vampires* as *The Heroic Trio*. *Irma Vep* (Olivier Assayas, 1996). Zeitgeist Films, all rights reserved.

33 In *Hollywood Planet: Global Media and the Competitive Advantage of Narrative Transparency* (Mahwah, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999) Scott Robert Olson suggests that Hollywood and other US media 'cater to as multicultural an audience as possible', one that 'brings with its expectations for movies and television many different ethnic, religious, linguistic, and social backgrounds', so that 'the media must pare down narratives to their essentials', p. 85.

34 In a recent issue of *The New York Times Magazine* on film and globalization, Susan Dominus contemplates: 'Cheung's English, though accented, is fluent; her beauty, universal; her talent, unarguable – the imprimatur of Cannes confirmed the cross-cultural appeal her Chinese fans have appreciated for years. To wonder why Cheung isn't a Hollywood star is to wonder a bigger question: why hasn't any contemporary Asian actress become a major Hollywood star?' Dominus's unwavering eurocentrism attempts to sustain the very relevance of the question posed by her article. Indeed, Cheung is baffled by why such a question should interest her. Among other offensive slips, Dominus reports that 'Asian audiences' have watched Cheung 'morph over the years from Audrey Hepburn to Greta Garbo'; she also conflates Asian and American. Susan Dominus, 'Why isn't Maggie Cheung a Hollywood star?', *The New York Times Magazine*, 14 November 2004, pp. 110–15.

35 Ginette Vincendeau, *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2000), pp. 35–6.

36 Susan Hayward, 'Framing national cinemas', in Hjort and MacKenzie (eds), *Cinema and Nation*, p. 97.

Hollywood creates a consumerist, white, middle-class, heterosexual version of US nationality, which it markets to the world simultaneously as quintessentially 'American' and ineffably 'universal'.³³ Since most national cinemas construct themselves in relation to Hollywood, stars from other national cinemas appear more 'national' (less 'universal') than most Hollywood stars. Whereas Julia Roberts and the Hollywood movie star she portrays in *Notting Hill* (Roger Michell, 1999) can be 'just a girl', the man she loves (played by Hugh Grant) stands out as very 'English'. Global superstars like Jackie Chan and Shahrukh Khan remain Chinese and Indian despite being more recognized by larger audiences than most Hollywood stars. Given the economic and political power of Hollywood, even the world's biggest female star, Aishwarya Rai, a former 'Miss World', cannot pretend to be 'just a girl' in the way that Roberts's star character pretends. As a former 'Miss Hong Kong', Cheung is marked as Chinese in ways that Roberts, comparably, is not marked as American.³⁴

Ginette Vincendeau points to the typically gendered dimension of identifications of stars with French national identity. Male stars, she writes, 'elicit an identification with public figures and actual historical events', whereas female stars 'symbolize the nation in ways which refer . . . to allegory on the one hand and the body on the other'.³⁵ More generally, Hayward argues that 'the nation pretends to be gender-neutral (in that it purports to dissolve difference) and yet the woman's body is closely aligned/identified with nationalist discourses'.³⁶ Questions, then, arise as to whether Cheung's role as Maggie in *Irma Vep* is contingent on national allegory and the body, as Vincendeau argues about French female actors, as well as whether Cheung's role differs from Maggie's role in Vidal's remake of *Les Vampires*.

The bodies of Cheung and Maggie are foreign bodies in a French film set in France, so that orientalist stereotypes invariably come into play, altering the gendered dimension of cinematic bodies. Typecast as a 'dragon lady', Anna May Wong, for example, embodied the threat of foreignness, an eroticized disruption of the 'American' nation that was less allegorical than literal in its racism. Although the bodies of western men may signify historical figures and historical events, the bodies of 'Asian' men often serve as feminized allegories for foreignness in western films. As with Italian-born Rudolf Valentino and Mexican-born Roman Navarro, the threat to white masculinity of Japanese-born Sessue Hayakawa's 'Latin lover' role as the Japanese (and later Burmese) prince in *The Cheat* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1915) is partially averted because the character is framed by feminizing sexual objectification, often through suggestions of bisexuality or homosexuality. Comparable objectification and emasculation are evident in the roles of male Hong Kong stars in contemporary western films, such as Tony Leung Ka Fai in *L'Amant/The Lover* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1992), a film whose narrative emphasizes the Asian male body as inherently weak. Despite his bodily strength and command of martial arts Jet Li's role as Han Sing in *Romeo Must Die* (Andrzej Bartkowiak, 2000) shows him being overpowered by a much younger African American

- 37 *L'Amant* is a French–UK–Vietnamese coproduction. In the role of ‘le Chinois’/the ‘Chinaman’, Leung is emasculated by the lead character, a much younger French woman (played by British actor Jane March). Although Li’s character is emasculated by Trish O’Day (Aaliyah) in *Romeo Must Die*, he saves the western woman. In both films, key scenes of the emasculation of Asian men take place in the private space of an automobile.
- 38 The only US-born Hollywood star mentioned is Steven Seagal. The ‘American woman’ berates her lover Fred, who has left her alone in Paris where she knows no one and has been forced to amuse herself by seeing ‘every fucking movie in this town, and that includes a Steven Seagal movie’, something for which she will never forgive him.
- 39 Poshek Fu and David Desser, ‘Introduction’, in Poshek Fu and David Desser (eds), *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Art, Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 5.
- 40 Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, ‘Chinese cinemas (1896–1996) and transnational film studies’, introduction in Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu (ed.), *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i, 1997), pp. 1–3.
- 41 Yingjin Zhang, *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese China* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies/University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 38.
- 42 For theorizations of these types of nationalisms, see Stuart Hall, ‘New ethnicities’, reprinted in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1995); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Johann Gottfried von Herder, ‘Germans and Slavs’, from *Ideas for the History of Mankind*, vol. 16 (1784–1791), reprinted in

woman.³⁷ By contrast, European-born Hollywood actors and directors, such as Arnold Schwarzenegger (Austria), Jean-Claude van Damme (Belgium), and Ridley Scott (UK) are not subjected to feminization. Transnational stardom complicates discussions of conventional gendered patterns of audience identification of stars with national identity.³⁸

Even with the knowledge that Maggie does not perform her own stunts, her body and body language do seem to evoke for Vidal a national allegory for Hong Kong as complex as Hong Kong itself. As noted by Poshek Fu and David Desser: ‘Hong Kong presents a theoretical conundrum. The accepted model of a national cinema seems hardly to apply to the Hong Kong situation – a Chinese community under British rule, a cinema without a nation, a local cinema with international appeal. Perhaps a postmodern model is more appropriate – a transnational cinema, a cinema of pastiche, a commercial cinema, a genre cinema, a self-conscious, self-reflexive cinema, ungrounded in a nation, multiple in its identities.’³⁹ Hong Kong cinema simultaneously simplifies and complicates questions of national identity. Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu employs the term ‘transnational Chinese cinema’ to designate film production, cinematic representations of ‘China’, and audiences that spill over the state borders that divide the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan, Hong Kong and diasporic Chinatowns.⁴⁰ Yingjin Zhang largely agrees with Lu’s formulation but finds that it overstates the transnational aspect of Chinese cinema prior to the 1990s and that a ‘replacement of “national cinema” by “transnational cinema” as an overriding term for Chinese film production in the first half of the century runs the risk of erasing the issues of cultural colonialism’.⁴¹ Hong Kong cinema and its stars, many of whom emigrate from the PRC and elsewhere, resists simple national definition, so that Maggie’s performance in Vidal’s film – and Cheung’s in Assayas’s film – is a hybrid, complex and fragmented identity, more closely defined according to difference and diversity of postcolonial nationalisms than according to the ethnocentric, imagined or ascriptive nationalism of nation states that is evident in classical Hollywood and the golden ages of French cinema.⁴²

When asked about how she goes about creating a character, Cheung remarks: ‘I start with an image: her body language, how she would walk and talk. You have to be able to physically feel that person before you can get into her heart’.⁴³ She comments that she is often directed to act with her body, to use her posture and movements to express her character’s emotions. Since synchronized sound, until the late 1990s, was uncommon in Hong Kong cinematic productions, which were typically dubbed with Mandarin and Cantonese soundtracks, body language represents a significant aspect to Cheung’s ability to play a character. More than her voice, Cheung’s image has made her a transnational star. Not unexpectedly, Cheung’s dialogue in *Irma Vep* demystifies her star persona. In her post-casting interview with Vidal, Maggie explains that she does not perform her own stunts and Vidal must hire a stunt double to perform some of Irma Vep’s scramble across a pitched rooftop to gain access into an apartment.

Hans Kohn (ed.), *Nationalism: its Meaning and History* (New York, NY: Van Nostrand, 1955), pp. 103–10; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (rev. edn New York, NY: Verso, 1991); Ernest Gellner, 'Nationalism and high culture', in John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (eds), *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 63–70; and Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

- 43 As cited in Bérénice Reynaud, 'Icon of Modernity' (interview with Maggie Cheung), *Cinemaya*, vol. 37 (1997), p. 36.

- 44 Bérénice Reynaud, 'I can't sell my acting like that' (interview with Maggie Cheung), *Sight and Sound*, vol. 7 no. 3 (March 1997), pp. 24–6; and Bérénice Reynaud, 'Icon of modernity' (interview with Maggie Cheung), *Cinemaya*, vol. 37 (1997), pp. 32–6.

Maggie performs the role of Irma Vep with uncertainty. She has watched Musidora's performance of the character in a videotape copy of *Les Vampires*, but Maggie's performance does not include the silent-era gestures of Musidora's performance, gestures that themselves are modest in their drama by comparison to conventional silent-film acting, as Vidal points out in his direction to Maggie. Whereas Musidora's movements are forceful, exaggerated by the faster film speed on the silent film stock (18–20 fps), Maggie's movements are hesitant and perplexed. In order to better embody the part, Maggie goes so far as to put on her latex catsuit, creep surreptitiously up the hotel stairway and down the corridor into another hotel guest's room, where she steals a necklace and carries it with her onto the hotel's rooftop. Playing herself, she recognizes, is not what Vidal really wants from her performance.

The question of what it means for Cheung to play 'herself' invites consideration that 'Maggie Cheung' is a westernized nickname for Cheung Man-yuk, who is also known in transliteration as Cheung Man-yu or Zhang Man-yu in transnational Chinese cinemas. In Hong Kong she acted in more than eighty films in sixteen years, internationally known for her work as May, the 'cute female decoy' or 'girl next door', in the Jackie Chan *Police Story* films. She was also known for her work in Hong Kong fantasy films, such as *Ching Se/Green Snake* (Tsui Hark, 1993), and historical epics, such as the remake of *Xin long men ke zhan/Dragon Inn* (Raymond Lee, 1992). Even before *Irma Vep*, Cheung was an international star by virtue of her work in films directed by Hong Kong new-wave filmmakers, such as Wong Kar-Wai, Ann Hui and Stanley Kwan. She became the first Chinese actress to win an international award, a Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival, for her self-reflexive role in Kwan's *Centre Stage* and, more recently, a 'Best Actress' award at the Cannes Film Festival for her work in *Clean* (Olivier Assayas, 2004). Cheung departs from the western clichés and orientalist fantasies about Chinese actresses, however, due to her star persona as a 'modern Hong Kong woman'. Nonetheless, in the realm of paracinematic fandom, Cheung has received the dubious honor of gracing the cover of the orientalist fanzine, *Asian Cult Cinema*.

Cheung also departs from western stereotypes of Chinese women because she allegedly speaks English better than she reads Chinese.⁴⁴ Her English has been called both 'British working class' and typical of 'Hong Kong British'. More significant than Cheung's precise 'national' accent, she does not speak the Chinese-inflected Pidgin English that Chinese British actor Nancy Kwan was directed to do in overtly racist films such as *The World of Suzie Wong* (Richard Quine, 1960) and *Flower Drum Song* (Henry Koster, 1961), among countless other actors. Cheung's native fluency in English becomes a part of the narrative in *Irma Vep*. In the film, Cheung's character Maggie speaks no French, so the other characters address her in 'her language'.

Assayas explains his concept for *Irma Vep*: 'I made this film because I had an idea I liked very much: a Chinese actress being lifted out of her

45 Steve Erickson, 'Making a connection between the cinema, politics, and real life: an interview with Olivier Assayas', *Cineaste*, vol. 22, no. 4 (1997), p. 7.

46 Ibid.

47 Steve Erickson, 'Making a connection between the cinema, politics, and real life', pp. 7–8.

48 As quoted in Jean-Marc Lalanne, 'Cette impression répétée de naître au cinéma' (interview with Maggie Cheung), *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 553 (January 2001), p. 54.

49 Bérénice Reynaud, 'I can't sell my acting like that' (interview with Maggie Cheung), *Sight and Sound*, vol. 7 no. 3 (March 1997), pp. 24–6; Bérénice Reynaud, 'Icon of modernity', p. 36.

world in Hong Kong, taken to France, just discovering French cinema and watching it with a new eye, with French people around her trying to explain it in English. When you're speaking a foreign language, you say things much more bluntly and violently than when you speak your native language. I like the idea of all these characters speaking their mind to her which they probably wouldn't do in French, about filmmaking and about the way they feel about their friends.'⁴⁵ It is perhaps due to its relentless questioning of the viability of French cinema that *Irma Vep* has become a cult favorite of 'le jeune cinéma'.

The very 'Frenchness' of the film is complicated, not only by its Hong Kong star, but also by nearly half the dialogue taking place in English. 'But it's in very bad English', Assayas comments; 'that's part of the joke'.⁴⁶ The journalist who 'likes John Woo' read his lines phonetically. None of the characters speaks English as a first language, even 'l'Américaine', portrayed by the Lebanese-born, Armenian Canadian actor Arsinée Khanjian, who speaks on the telephone to her lover Fred in an accented English that does not really resemble any 'native' US regional accent, perhaps a joke at the expense of francophone audiences who do not recognize differences in accented English. *Irma Vep* also makes use of English-language songs as nondiegetic and diegetic music, including Serge Gainsbourg and Brigitte Bardot singing 'Bonnie and Clyde' in heavily accented English. Of course, the prominent use of English in *Irma Vep* also makes the film more appealing to anglophone audiences who enjoy French cinema but understand little French language.

To raise serious questions about the viability of making or remaking French films in a film with a significant portion of its dialogue in English, Assayas makes a curious manoeuvre. He explains: 'It makes me crazy when I constantly hear French people say that we should make big-budget films in English because they can make lots of money in the U.S. These people don't really understand American culture or the English language. They usually speak very poor English. If they want a film in English, *Irma Vep* is it!'⁴⁷ Assayas refers to films such as *The Fifth Element* (Luc Besson, 1997) and *The Lover* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1992), which emerged out of the local and overseas success of 'le cinéma du look' and heritage cinema.

Cheung is said to have accepted the part in *Irma Vep* due to her fatigue with the 'monotony' of the Hong Kong film industry, equating the opportunity to make a film in France without speaking much French as a means to add adventure to her profession.⁴⁸ She declined other offers by western filmmakers, sensing that she would have been limited to playing western stereotypes of Chinese women. She reported in an interview about her role in Assayas's low-budget film: 'I really appreciate Olivier, because he doesn't want me to pretend to be more Chinese than I really am'; in another interview, she explained: 'I am quite Westernised and often when Westerners cast Chinese actors in a part, they want them to be Chinese-Chinese. But he said, "No, don't ever do that, just be you," and I really appreciated that.'⁴⁹ The question, then, arises as to what it means to

ask a transnational star to perform herself in a French film during a period when French identity was highly unstable.

After meeting Cheung at the Venice Film Festival, Assayas conceived the idea of Cheung portraying a Hong Kong actor in Paris because he thought that Cheung's star persona would be relatively unknown to French audiences. Cheung might not have been widely known to French audiences during the 1990s, but she was already a star in many parts of the world, including neighbouring Germany. Several years before *Irma Vep*, Cheung won a 'Best Actress' award at the Berlin Film Festival for her self-reflexive role in *Yuen Ling-yuk/Centre Stage/Actress* (Stanley Kwan, 1992), a biopic about the legendary Ruan Lingyu from the golden age of Shanghai cinema.⁵⁰ Kwan's inspiration for the film came after he saw a series of films starring Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo and Ruan, entitled 'Three Goddesses of the Silver Screen', at the Hong Kong Arts Centre in 1988.⁵¹ Kwan imagines Cheung's face as archetypal, like the faces of the three screen goddesses from classical cinema. Assayas remembers his first encounter with Cheung in similar terms. 'It was a vision', he says; 'I didn't think contemporary cinema could still produce an actress with an aura. I felt like a little kid looking at the great stars of the past.'⁵² Vidal would seem to share the childish attraction to Maggie's star persona.

In *Irma Vep*, Maggie's face is captured by a mobile camera in medium shots and medium close-ups, not unlike other female actors in the film. On the set of the remake of *Les Vampires*, the camera diligently follows the choreography of Maggie and the other actors on the set. Cuts to close-ups of Maggie's face follow medium shots, rather than the more abrupt cuts from long shots to medium-close-ups on Musidora's face in Feuillade's serial, particularly in 'Le cryptogramme rouge/The red codebook' episode, in which Irma Vep sings in a cabaret. Musidora is shot frontally. Close-ups of Musidora are often rendered in long takes, typically reserved for long shots according to continuity editing patterns emerging at the time. Maggie's eyes do not express the same confidence or 'transgressive' qualities of Musidora's facial and ocular expressions. In his final edit, Vidal actually obliterates Maggie's ocular performance by covering the image of her eyes on the film with scratches and geometrical shapes, creating an exaggerated effect of Irma Vep's gaze by tracing the path of vision from Maggie's eyes (figures 2–4). Yet close-ups of Maggie reveal other differences at work in the remake.

Maggie's eye makeup differs from the model of Musidora's. The dark shadowing beneath the eyes is less emphasized, so that the round insets of Musidora's eyes become pinched ovals on Maggie. Further attention is called to eye shape with the diagonal zippers on the 'S/M' mask that Maggie wears, which differs from the less ornate and less erotic knit mask worn by Musidora. When the zippers are open to reveal her eyes, Maggie can no longer be anonymous, as is evident in the scene in which the film crew sits to watch the daily rushes. Rather than conceal difference in Chinese and French phenotypes, the mask works to call attention to them. Unlike Musidora's face, Maggie's face is racialized in

⁵⁰ Cheung's performance in *Centre Stage* links her star status with that of Ruan. Kwan juxtaposes scenes in which Cheung reenacts famous scenes from Ruan's films with footage from the actual films. In the opening sequence, Kwan shows stills from Ruan's films to Cheung, who draws a parallel between Ruan's career trajectory from popular to serious and her own. The difference, Cheung, remarks, is that Ruan's career ended when she was twenty-six and already a 'legend'.

⁵¹ Kristine Harris, 'The New Woman incident: cinema, scandal, and spectacle in 1935 Shanghai', in Lu (ed.), *Transnational Chinese Cinemas*, p. 298.

⁵² Bérénice Reynaud, 'I can't sell my acting like that', p. 26.

Figures 2–4
René Vidal's vision of a new
French cinema. Maggie Cheung in
***Irma Vep* (Olivier Assayas, 1996).**
Zeitgeist Films, all rights reserved.



53 France A-Z online, web site for the Embassy of France in the US: <http://www.info-france-usa.org/atoz/marianne.asp> (accessed 27 February 2003). Nationality is imposed upon the anonymous 'beurette', not unlike the ascribed citizenship for many second-generation Algerians born in France under the statute of Article 44. Rogers Brubaker provides an analysis of the implications of Articles 23 and 44 on Algerian immigrants in chapter 7, "'Etre français, cela se mérite'": immigration and the politics of citizenship in France in the 1980s', in *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 138–64.

54 Diane Negra finds that 'in an era in which "white ethnicity emerges as a trope for empowerment", ethnic identity is valued for its own sake in opposition to a whiteness deemed sterile'. Diane Negra, *Off-white Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 4. Ethnic whiteness in Hollywood, however, often manages cultural difference by attempting to distance ethnic (rarely racial) representations from their historical precedents in negative stereotypes. The 'model minority' stereotype for Asian Americans foregrounds the priority of assimilating to 'white' standards.

Paris. Maggie's 'Irma Vep' makeup suggests an awareness of France's reimagination of itself as a multiracial, multiethnic and multireligious 'nation', while maintaining its traditions of cultural assimilation and national ascription, as is evident in the most recent model for la Marianne, an 'anonymous beurette (young woman of North African descent)', to cite the phrase on a French embassy web site.⁵³ Like the 'anonymous beurette', Maggie also may be seen to represent an 'alternative' to the *Français de souche* (Franco-French Catholic) conception of French identity, inviting comparison with the ambivalence in Hollywood's 'off-white' representations of US national identity.⁵⁴

Cheung's role attempts to demystify the notion of cinematic 'archetypes' based on classical cinemas. Hollywood magic allowed Dietrich and Garbo to pass, visually at least, as European American – if not Anglo American, the mythical default for ethnicity in the US. Had she established a career in Hollywood like her European sister goddesses, however, Ruan would have been marked as foreign, as was her contemporary Anna May Wong, the Chinese American actor whose roles were largely limited to 'dragon ladies' and 'mesdames butterfly'. Born in Hong Kong, Cheung moved at age six with her family to Kent, UK, where she was the only Chinese student at school. She returned to Hong Kong aged seventeen after realizing that, in the UK, a 'woman of color' would always be relegated to second choice in anything, including a modeling career. Although Maggie becomes Vidal's first and only choice for the role of Irma Vep, Maggie is marked as a foreigner in France in a manner not unlike her childhood experiences in the UK. The key difference is that Maggie is recognized as a star, if not a recognized star. For the film crew, she becomes an object of curiosity rather than myopia.

Referring to Maggie's costuming and use of a stunt double, *Cahiers du cinéma* writes that 'the reality of her presence is indeed not real, but truly

55 Serge Grünberg, 'Le vol des bijoux' (interview with Olivier Assayas about *Irma Vep*), *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 507 (September 1996), p. 47.

56 Stuart Ewen, *All-consuming Images: the Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (New York, NY: Basic Books/HarperCollins, 1988), p. 248. Ewen provides an example for the USA. He traces the expression 'right on' from its relatively exclusive use in African American communities during the 1960s, including its use in a speech by Black Panther party leader Bobby Seale, to its reduction as a commodity in an advertising campaign for Bic ballpoint pens (biros) as 'Write on!', p. 251. The 'meaning' of images that are reduced to style can, of course, be resurrected. Graphic images of the US flag on T-shirts for designer clothing brands, such as Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger, no longer appeared 'stylized' after the US invaded Iraq.

57 Bérénice Reynaud, 'I can't sell my acting like that', p. 26.

58 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957), trans. Annette Lavers (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972), p. 56.

59 Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 4, 47.

60 Bruce Robbins, 'Introduction part I: actually existing cosmopolitanism', in Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 1.

illusory'.⁵⁵ The 'illusion' implied, however, is quite different from arguments that cosmopolitanism suggests an illusory privilege of being beyond the lived realities of nationalism. This illusion implies artifice, deception, falsification, 'lies' in the sense of fiction, 'magic' in the sense of Hollywood. Illusions, however, are sometimes revealing of truths in not-so-apparent ways. The emphasis on Maggie's 'Asianness' in her costume and make-up as Irma Vep stands in sharp contrast to Maggie's own cosmopolitan dress. She arrives in Paris, wearing a shirt, accented with international flags (figure 1). The shirt transforms official state flags into consumable 'style', reducing them from markers of national identity into a 'flickering procession of familiar images' comparable to what Stuart Ewen describes as the destiny of resistant counter-cultures in an era of consumerist societies.⁵⁶ In combination, the national flags are available to anyone, regardless of citizenship; they signify a community of nations in the sense of the UN rather than the flag-waving of war-mongering 'nations'. Maggie performs cosmopolitanism. She is not '*sans papiers*', the status of undocumented immigrants often blamed for France's social crises, but a transnational star, a privileged member of the '*les gens du spectacle*' (people working in the entertainment industry).

For Vidal, Maggie's star persona operates outside the political realities of her citizenship. She is conceived as free to work on films wherever she chooses with work permits and visas as non-issues, and she is directed to 'just be herself'. The question of Maggie playing herself is linked to Vidal's highly subjective reading of her screen presence to conjure the 'archetypes' of classical cinema. A review of *Irma Vep* agrees, suggesting that, 'as a sensuous and mysterious Irma Vep, Cheung joins the legendary pantheon of the silent era – Louise Brooks, Lillian Gish, Marlene Dietrich – her face and body transcend into light and beauty, pure cinematic signifiers'.⁵⁷ In this analysis, Cheung's face would function at a mythological level comparable to Roland Barthes's analysis of Garbo's face. It is a naked mask, a depersonalized, decontextualized, universalized face; it is 'an archetype of the human face'.⁵⁸ The 'face of Garbo', of course, would not exist without the erasure of Garbo's 'ethnic features' under diffuse three-point lighting and a thick layer of white makeup.⁵⁹ This pure signification, however, evokes utopic aspirations of cosmopolitanism, which have shifted markedly since the late 1950s when Barthes fetishized Garbo's face.

Once associated with the elite status of aristocrats and merchants, cosmopolitanism 'seemed to claim universality by virtue of its independence, its detachments from the bonds, commitments, and affiliations that constrain ordinary nation-bound lives'.⁶⁰ More recently, cosmopolitanism has come to encompass less privileged, and often coerced, forms of transnational movements, such as guest workers and slaves. James Clifford points to the problem that 'the term cosmopolitanism, separated from its (European) universalist moorings, quickly becomes a traveling signifier, a term always in danger of breaking up into partial equivalences: exile, immigration, migrancy,

⁶¹ James Clifford, 'Mixed feelings', in Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds), *Cosmopolitics*, p. 363.

⁶² See, for example, Georges Fouron and Nina Glick Schiller, 'The generation of identity: redefining the second generation within a transnational social field', in Hector Cordero-Guzman Robert Smith and Roman Grosfoguel (eds), *Migration, Transnationalism, and Race in a Changing New York* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), pp. 58–86. Depending on what laws are in place, transmigrants may participate in national elections in 'sending' countries, such as Haiti and Romania, as well as in 'receiving' countries, such as the USA.

⁶³ Bruce Robbins, 'Actually existing cosmopolitanism', pp. 2–3.

⁶⁴ Thomas McCarthy, 'On reconciling cosmopolitan unity and national diversity', *Public Culture*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1999), p. 180.

diaspora, border crossing, pilgrimage, tourism'.⁶¹ In recent anthropological studies, transnationalism has been discussed, as a mode of political action in more than one nation state, rather than mere border crossing.⁶² By contrast, cosmopolitanism becomes a type of citizenship to a 'global community' with cosmopolitan subjects not necessarily participating in national politics.

Like transnationalism, however, cosmopolitanism works in tandem with nationalism. 'Instead of an ideal of detachment [from nation]', Bruce Robbins writes, 'actually existing cosmopolitanism is a reality of (re)attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance'.⁶³ Discussions of cosmopolitanism, however, are always complicated by historical associations of the term. Thomas McCarthy attempts to recuperate a sense of 'unity in difference' from Immanuel Kant's writing on cosmopolitanism. He proposes that 'reconciling national diversity with cosmopolitan unity is one component of a response' to the problems of thinking about unity in diversity.⁶⁴ Transnationalism, then, suggests political agency in more than one state; cosmopolitanism suggests apolitical agency in any number of states. In an era of global capitalism, however, economic agency functions as a form of political agency, so that cosmopolitan stars mobilize political power through work in multiple states. This power, however, is not equitably distributed.

When working outside the country of their citizenship, film stars often benefit from special considerations that draw comparison with cosmopolitanism. In France, laws regulating 'les gens du spectacle' foreground some of the problems associated with transnational labour. At one level of analysis, these laws afford foreign citizens special privileges (such as seasonal work permits or visas); at another level, these laws reduce foreign citizens to spectacle, to 'gypsies' as they are sometimes called. The spectacle of foreignness – its overdetermined meaning – is central to Maggie's role as Irma Vep in Vidal's film, as well as to Cheung's role in *Irma Vep*. Despite its apparent 'archetypal' or 'mask-like' characteristics, the spectacle of Maggie centres upon her face, which is hardly the pure signification in Barthes's fantasy about Garbo. In *Irma Vep*, the film crew includes (presumably) French citizens of northern and western African ancestry among the *Français de souche* majority. Any unity in diversity is ephemeral, however. Disunity among film cast and crew is projected onto its most 'diverse' member, the non-French star Maggie. Owing to their petty animosities towards one another, the white French characters in *Irma Vep* potentially suggest a ribald parody of eurocentrism.

After Vidal suffers a nervous breakdown, the production company quickly replaces him with José Murano (Lou Castel), who accepts the project on the condition that he can replace Maggie – or 'une Chinoise', as he disparagingly calls her, evoking the title to Godard's 1967 political film *La Chinoise* – with a French actor. Murano remembers having seen *Les Vampires* in his youth as part of Henri Langlois's programming at the Cinémathèque Française. Murano's disbelief that Vidal should hire a

⁶⁵ SLON is an acronym for 'Société pour le lancement d'œuvres nouvelles'/'Society for the launch of new works'. The militant group was one of many formed in post-1968 France, including Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin's Groupe Dziga-Vertov.

⁶⁶ Murano has been described as 'a couch-potato hybrid of two Marcos: Ferreri and Bellocchio', whose 'boorishness reminds us of the gap between cinema's lofty rhetoric and often venal motives'. Howard Hampton, 'Heroic brio' (review of *Irma Vep*), *Artforum*, vol. 35, no. 9 (May 1997), p. 20. Castel, the actor who plays Murano, was born in Bogotá, Colombia.

⁶⁷ For studies of the 'yellow peril', see Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1993). For analysis of Fu Manchu, see Sheng-mei Ma, *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

⁶⁸ Anne T. Ciecko and Sheldon H. Lu, 'The heroic trio: Anita Mui, Maggie Cheung, Michelle Yeoh – self-reflexivity and the globalization of the Hong Kong action heroine', *Post Script*, vol. 19, no. 1 (Fall 1999), p. 76.

'Chinese' actor to play Irma Vep, however, is somewhat undercut in the context of Georges Franju's 1964 remake of Feuillade's *Judex* (1916), starring the US-born stage magician Channing Pollock in the role of the hero, Jacques de Tremeuse or 'Judex', first played by René Cresté. Franju would be a contemporary of the fictional directors, Vidal and Murano, as well as a contemporary of documentary filmmaker Chris Marker, whose Groupe SLON 'militant film' *Classe de lutte/Class Struggle* (1969) appears on the home television at a dinner hosted by Vidal's cinematographer Markus and becomes an example of what some of Vidal's crew believes French cinema should be.⁶⁵ Pollack, of course, is not racialized in a manner equivalent to Maggie and, as such, is more able to pass silently as French, as was the face of Garbo, yet Murano's insistence on a French actor is based upon chauvinism as much as it is upon racism.

The production company agrees to Murano's condition, and Maggie is fired from the project. In his rambling offer of the role to Laure (Nathalie Boutefeu), Murano equates Irma Vep with Arletty, another icon of Paris in the cinema of poetic realism. Although perhaps best known for her portrayal of Garance in *Les Enfants du paradis/The Children of Paradise* (Marcel Carné, 1945), the familiarity of Arletty's image in the prewar period allowed the audience the pleasure of recognition and identification in a time of unstable national identity, although she was never so revolutionary or sexualized as Musidora. The character of Murano reveals other aspects of Paris-centred French nationalism. Murano has lived in Paris for thirty years, yet he seems to overcompensate for his provincial origins in the southwest of France, something that comes out in his accent, as well as in his 'non-French' name, as he evokes the sanctity of Musidora as Paris.⁶⁶ Murano's prejudice for a French actor cannot be separated from the racism at the heart of most first-world nationalisms. Murano's most reactionary evocation of French imperialism is mediated by Hollywood. '*Les Vampires n'est pas Fu Manchu*', he proclaims in a fit of disbelief that Vidal would cast Maggie as Irma Vep. Fu Manchu is the Anglo-American orientalist personification of the 'yellow peril' or Asian threat to 'white purity' and binaristic counterpart to the 'model minority' of Charlie Chan.⁶⁷ As an unsuccessful director whose welfare benefits have been exhausted, forcing him to accept the television project, Murano's self-worth would seem to be contingent upon a nostalgia for France's imperialist past.

Murano's commitment to French cinema is different from Vidal's. Murano cannot think beyond the orientalist tropes of Fu Manchu, cannot fathom Vidal's seemingly transnational conception of French cinema. Anne Ciecko and Sheldon Lu have argued that '*Irma Vep* points to a way to revamp and reinvent French national cinema by casting and cashing in on the star quality of a Hong Kong actress, by hybridizing and transnationalizing the industry'.⁶⁸ The unconsciousness of Murano's evocation of orientalist discourse, naturalized by the handheld

69 Walter Metz, 'From Jean-Paul Belmondo to Stan Brakhage: romanticism and intertextuality in *Irma Vep* and *Les Misérables*', *Film Criticism*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2002), pp. 80–81. Earlier, Alan Williams interpreted Vidal's footage to be an 'homage to Brakhage' in 'National filmmaking and cinema tradition: the strange case of *Irma Vep*', *Contemporary French Civilization*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1998), pp. 303–9. Tom Conley finds Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes tropiques* (1955) useful in his analysis of Vidal's 'writing' on the celluloid. He also equates 'a portly Indian woman in a sari' as seeming 'to belong to space and time of years past'. See his 'Revamping Irma: immodest reflections on French cinema and globalization', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2000), pp. 417–33.

documentary-like camerawork of Assayas's film, which adopts the aesthetics, if not the politics, of *cinéma vérité*, would seem to suggest that not all French filmmakers are comfortable with such a prospect. Although Maggie emerges largely unscathed from the chaos of the production, her poise and professionalism unwittingly play into certain western stereotypes of Asian women. Once she is costumed as Irma Vep – her face powdered white, dark makeup in elongated circles around her eyes, her body encased in a black latex catsuit – she comes to embody, at least for some of the cast and crew of Vidal's film, a strange conflation of 'exotic' cinematic representations. She is at once a representation of orientalist fantasies of 'China dolls', orientalist anxieties of 'dragon ladies', bondage fantasies of dominatrices and cinematic anxieties of vamps. The costume designer Zoé, for example, jokingly mentions to a friend that she would like to play with Maggie as if she were a plastic toy – perhaps a Chinese Barbie doll, perhaps a living dildo, so that the play is at once childish and sexual. Like the 'attractions' of early cinema – of the Lumières and Méliès – the attraction of Maggie is somehow extradiegetic, somehow beyond what the film's narrative can contain.

In the final sequence of *Irma Vep*, the film crew watches Vidal's edit of the extant footage before his departure from the project. Despite Vidal's professions of an admiration for the 'distance' in Feuillade's images (long shots) and a respect for the 'silence' of silent films when he turns off the 'piano' (canned nondiegetic musical score) when showing Maggie a video copy of *Les Vampires*, abundant close-ups and a nonverbal and atonal soundtrack overwhelm footage that has been heavily modified in postproduction. Critics have interpreted Vidal's 'scratch film method' as paying homage to Stan Brakhage's experimental filmmaking, suggesting that Brakhage mediates French cinema from Lettrist films to *Irma Vep*.⁶⁹ The film invites such formalist analysis through its continual references to canonical film history. This reading, however, does not take into account the subject of the raw images that Vidal scratches, the particular character of the distortions to the images produced by the scratching, and the use of nonverbal sound. The character of Irma Vep is distinctly 'not French' in Vidal's vision. She is hybrid, transnational, perhaps cosmopolitan. The film *Irma Vep*, then, is less a film about filmmaking, or a film about Feuillade as 'cinema's brilliant primitive', than it is about filmmaking in an era of global capitalism. It is less a film about re-presenting the past, than it is a film about addressing the present, specifically the place of France within the global economy.

Baudrillard reloaded: interrelating philosophy and film via *The Matrix Trilogy*

CATHERINE CONSTABLE

The Matrix Trilogy has generated a flurry of writing expounding and explaining its philosophical themes. The trilogy can be seen to raise key questions, such as, how do we know that what we experience is real? The films' themes evoke long-standing debates, specifically reality vs illusion and free will vs determinism. There are at least two compilation volumes dedicated to philosophical analyses of the first film, the contributors offering sketches of the ways in which it uses the work of particular theorists, chiefly: Plato, Descartes, Marx, Putnam and Nozick.¹ More recent works attempt to address the philosophical themes of the trilogy as a whole.² These responses make sense given the extensive marketing of the trilogy as a new breed of 'intellectual action movie'.³ This is achieved by flaunting its philosophical credentials: firstly through the use of overt textual allusions, most famously, the presentation of Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* as a hiding place for Neo's computer discs, and secondly, through the inclusion of a dedicated philosophy section on the official website, which offers a range of essays from leading academics, such as Kevin Warwick, the British Professor of Cybernetics.⁴

The extensive range of writing on the philosophical aspects of *The Matrix Trilogy* raises the problems inherent to the interrelation of philosophy/theory and film texts in an acute form. The films are often treated as an introduction to a series of diverse and difficult theoretical concepts, meaning that – at best – they are seen as examples serving to make the theory accessible. At worst, the films are castigated for not

¹ William Irwin (ed.) *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (Chicago, IL and La Salle: Open Court, 2002) and Glenn Yeffeth (ed.) *Taking the Red Pill: Science, Philosophy and Religion in The Matrix* (Chichester: Summersdale, 2003).

² See, for example, Matt Lawrence, *Like a Splinter in Your Mind: The Philosophy Behind The Matrix Trilogy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

³ Quote from an interview with Larry Wachowski, emphasis mine, cited in Andrew Gordon, 'The Matrix: paradigm of postmodernism or intellectual poseur, part two', in Yeffeth (ed.) *Taking the Red Pill*, pp. 102–23, p. 103.

⁴ Jonathan Romney, 'Everywhere and nowhere', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 13, no. 7 (July 2003), pp. 25–6. The official Matrix website address is <http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com> (accessed 3 March 2004).

being sufficiently rigorous or critical and thus presented as failed critique or mere pseudo-philosophy. Both approaches can be seen to rely on an absolute division between philosophy and film texts, forming a hierarchy in which the films are invariably positioned at the bottom. Rather than viewing the films as mere illustrations or bad copies of philosophical arguments, I will argue that the scenarios offered by *The Matrix Trilogy* form an *active dialogue* with philosophy, challenging and changing the construction of key philosophical concepts.

I intend to do this by focusing on the films' take-up of a key source, Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulations*. The book appears on screen and the film script for *The Matrix* makes use of quotations from the first essay, 'The precession of simulacra', specifically Morpheus' line: 'Welcome to *the desert of the real*'.⁵ Importantly, it is the only text that the directors designated as required reading for cast members, thus conferring on it a privileged status above other philosophical source material.⁶ Despite this, there is very little writing on the series' use of Baudrillard, which may partly be due to the hostility that his work has aroused within Cultural Studies.

Setting up a dialogue between the philosophical and the filmic texts involves expanding a model for inter-relating the two media that I have developed elsewhere, using the work of the French feminist philosopher, Michèle le Doeuff.⁷ The first part of this article offers an outline of her main argument that imagery plays a vital role in philosophy and I will trace the ways in which the division between the philosophical and the poetic that she argues against re-emerges in current film theory. This will be followed by a brief assessment of her methodology and an explanation of its usefulness for interrelating philosophical and filmic texts. The second part of the article sets out a case study of the ways in which *The Matrix Trilogy* takes up and adapts Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal. I will begin by focusing on the films' take-up of the mirror imagery in *Simulacra and Simulation*. This will be followed by an analysis of Baudrillard's reworking of the myths of Orpheus and Eurydice. I will argue that this can be paralleled with the films' reworking of the figure of Persephone in that the adaptations recast the mythic material in ways that render them conceptually similar. I will end by looking at the ways in which the films depart from the Baudrillardian source material in that they find a place for value within the hyperreal.

Le Doeuff begins her main argument in *The Philosophical Imaginary* by noting that philosophical discourse is defined as 'the rational, the concept, the argued, the logical, the abstract' and is explicitly contrasted with the literary discourses of 'myth, fable, the poetic' which constitute 'the domain of the image'.⁸ This absolute division between the philosophical and the poetic is long standing. Plato famously expels poets from his ideal republic because their work makes use of vivid imagery and metre, offering listeners a pleasurable experience that interferes with the search for the truth – the *raison d'être* of philosophers. Vernant summarizes the dangers of poetry for Plato

5 The quotation from 'The precession of simulacra' is in italics. J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. S.F. Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 1.

6 A. Gordon, 'The Matrix: paradigm of postmodernism or intellectual poseur, part two', in Yeffeth (ed.) *Taking the Red Pill*, p. 103.

7 Catherine Constable, *Thinking in Images: Film Theory, Feminist Philosophy and Marlene Dietrich* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), pp. 29–54.

8 Michèle le Doeuff, 'Preface: the shameful face of philosophy', *The Philosophical Imaginary*, trans. Colin Gordon (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), pp.1–20, p. 1.

9 Jean-Pierre Vernant, 'The birth of images', in F. I. Zeitlin (ed. and trans.), *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 164–85, p. 177.

10 Le Doeuff, 'Preface: the shameful face of philosophy', p. 5.

11 Ibid., p. 7. My emphasis.

12 Ibid., p. 6.

13 David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 250.

14 Ibid., p. 28.

15 Ibid., p. 34.

16 Deborah Knight and George McKnight, 'Real genre and virtual philosophy', in Irwin (ed.) *The Matrix and Philosophy*, pp. 188–201. Quotation from Le Doeuff, 'Preface: the shameful face of philosophy', p. 1.

17 Knight and McKnight, 'Real genre and virtual philosophy', p. 196.

thus: 'it creates a semblance, an appearance, through a colorful glitter of words and rhythms that produce an effect of fascination and a vertigo of the mind'.⁹ However, Le Doeuff notes that Plato's advocacy of the separation of the philosophical from the poetic is not upheld in his own work, which is heavily reliant on 'mythic elements drawn from the Greek poetic heritage' while also offering numerous new stories, such as the myth of the cave.¹⁰ She concludes that Plato's inability to expel such imagery from his work suggests that it plays a significant, but thus far unacknowledged role, in the production of philosophy.

Le Doeuff argues that the western philosophical tradition allocates two apparently diverse roles to the image. In the first it is seen as a distraction, an embellishment that should be expunged from truly philosophical discourse; while in the second, the image acts as an illustration, translating complex ideas into an accessible form for the less able reader. She concludes that the two roles share a common basis in that both deny the image 'the status of an element *within* philosophical work . . . It is not part of the enterprise.'¹¹ Both roles can therefore be seen to maintain the absolute distinction between philosophy and the poetic. In contrast, le Doeuff argues that the abundance of imagery in philosophical texts suggests that it has 'a relation of solidarity with the theoretical enterprise itself . . . that it is, in the strict sense of the phrase, *at work* in these productions'.¹² Importantly, in this model, imagery serves as the means by which philosophical concepts are created and expressed – a point to which I will return later.

The traditional distinction between the philosophical and the poetic reappears in debates about the interrelation of theory and film within Film Studies. David Bordwell's definition of theorizing as writing that 'proposes, analyzes and criticizes theoretical claims' is explicitly contrasted with the craft-like practice of interpreting film texts.¹³ The use of theory within interpretation is said to be illegitimate because 'theoretical claims are renegotiated for the sake of practical criticism [and] . . . the revisions in the claims are never acknowledged'.¹⁴ Importantly, interpretative writing is defined as purely rhetorical, 'concerned only with persuasion, not truth', seeking to seduce its audience with a colorful glitter of words and, worse still, reducing theory to such glitter.¹⁵ Bordwell's crusade to purge theory of interpretative elements can be seen to parallel Plato's expulsion of the poets. On this occasion, interpretative writing takes up the first role that is traditionally allocated to the image – it constitutes an unwanted embellishment that has no place in pure theory.

Deborah Knight and George McKnight's article on *The Matrix* can be seen to perpetuate the opposition between philosophy and 'the domain of the image' in that they argue for an absolute division between philosophical and filmic discourses.¹⁶ The authors concede that the film raises philosophical questions but argue that these are the result of its generic inheritance, science fiction being defined by 'its focus on Big Questions, such as "What is the meaning of life?"'¹⁷ As a result, the

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., p. 200.

21 Ibid. These comments on intentionality seem highly suspect given the emphasis placed on the philosophical content of the film in its marketing.

22 Ibid., p. 196.

23 Ibid., p. 201. My emphasis.

24 Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Capsule review of *The Matrix*', *Chicago Reader*, quoted in David Lavery, 'From cinespace to cyberspace: zionists and agents, realists and gamers in *The Matrix* and *eXistenZ*', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 28, no. 4 (Winter 2001), pp. 150–7, p. 156, fn. 7.

25 John Hazelton, 'Review of *The Matrix*', *Screen International*, 16 April 1999, p. 15.

26 Gerald J. Erion and Barry Smith, 'Skepticism, morality and *The Matrix*', in Irwin (ed.) *The Matrix and Philosophy*, pp. 16–27, pp. 18, 20–22. See also Jason Holt, 'The machine-made ghost: or, the philosophy of mind, Matrix style' in Irwin (ed.), *ibid.*, pp. 66–74, p. 66.

27 Erion and Smith, 'Skepticism, morality and *The Matrix*', p. 18.

presence of such big questions in *The Matrix* does not mean that they are 'raised in a philosophically significant way'.¹⁸ The authors draw on the work of Peter Jones to argue that great novels, such as *Middlemarch*, *Anna Karenina* and *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, can 'raise points of philosophical interest without themselves being engaged in overtly philosophical discourse'.¹⁹ This is because the novels are said to constitute 'thematically organic narratives' that encourage serious reflection.²⁰ In contrast, *The Matrix* is presented as a genre film whose organizing principles are centrifugal – encouraging its viewers to make connections outside the diegetic world to other texts. Furthermore, the authors contend that the numerous philosophical allusions to Plato, Descartes et al. are 'primarily intended to promote suspense, anxiety, horror and even terror, not philosophical reflection'.²¹

Knight and McKnight's article can be seen to perpetuate a traditional hierarchical distinction between high and low culture. Pitting great literature against genre fiction, they reach the unsurprising conclusion that only the former is able to pose points of philosophical interest. This does not blur the boundary between philosophy and literature however, as the critic is said to bridge the gulf between the two discourses by drawing out the philosophical significance of the novel's 'thematics'.²² (It is worth noting that the novel is not said to offer 'concepts' or 'ideas', words that might indicate a foray into the discourses of philosophy.) Knight and McKnight do not adopt a similar critical technique in their reading of *The Matrix* because the film's generic inheritance means that it is deemed unworthy of such serious philosophical consideration. The intersection of two oppositional hierarchies: philosophy/literature and literature/genre, means that *The Matrix* cannot aspire to the status of philosophy; positioned third in line the film becomes a bad copy – 'an example of real genre, but only an instance of *virtual philosophy*'.²³

While Knight and McKnight justify their reading of *The Matrix* as pseudo-philosophy, others have been content simply to dismiss the film's philosophical 'pretensions'.²⁴ In a neat reversal of traditional philosophy's attempts to purge its texts of unwanted embellishments, such as imagery, summaries of the film's plot attempt to delineate the key elements of the narrative by removing extraneous details, such as the 'pseudo-philosophical baggage'.²⁵ Those who argue that the two discourses might have something in common utilize a vocabulary that draws attention to the use of imagery in both types of text. William Irwin's edited volume, *The Matrix and Philosophy*, contains a number of articles that use the term 'scenario' with reference to philosophical imagery, such as Descartes' figure of the malicious demon, as well as the filmic images.²⁶ However, the second essay in the volume defines all such scenarios as 'useful tools for exploring fundamental questions about knowledge and reality', thus creating a distinction between the philosophical/filmic imagery that aids the reader – as a tool – and the questions themselves – the true substance of philosophy.²⁷ The scenarios are seen to be ephemeral, changing in accordance with the readers'

needs; in contrast the questions are defined as unchanging and universal. In this way, the philosophical and filmic images are confined to the second role traditionally allocated to the image, acting as illustrations that aid the reader, and they are consequently excluded from the fundamental and timeless enterprise that is philosophy.

In arguing that the image plays a vital role in the formation of philosophy, Le Doeuff also challenges such traditional definitions of philosophical discourse as universal and ahistorical. She argues that philosophy takes up imagery that is circulated in wider social discourses, such as art and literature, and that by so doing it is inexorably linked to a specific place and time.²⁸ The take-up of cultural images into philosophical discourse is a recontextualization that crystallizes the images into a different formation in order to sustain the developing theoretical system. This process of crystallization means that the images become specific to that system, creating a distinctive vocabulary that Le Doeuff defines as the 'philosophical imaginary'.²⁹ However, this imaginary does not function in splendid isolation. The images are said to retain resonances derived from their previous contexts that may not sustain the concomitant theoretical system, thus forming possible points of destabilization within the philosophical text.³⁰ Furthermore, the take-up and use of images within philosophy forms part of a feedback loop in that the imagery generated by philosophy can be put back into circulation within wider social discourses.³¹

Le Doeuff offers a new methodology for reading philosophical texts, one that focuses on the imagery, drawing out its conceptual implications and the ways in which it works to sustain or destabilize the concomitant philosophical system. She is also concerned to combine textual and sociological analysis, showing how the philosophical imaginary feeds off and into wider social practices, specifically in its definitions of femininity.³² I would argue that it is this model of a feedback loop linking philosophy and other discourses as well as the presentation of the image as vital to the process of theorizing that means Le Doeuff's work offers a way of radically reconceptualizing the relation between philosophy and film. This involves expanding her argument that images act as the means through which theoretical concepts are created and expressed in order to view filmic imagery as a theoretical resource in that such images can be seen to have conceptual implications. Rather than viewing *The Matrix Trilogy* as, at best, an introduction to philosophical concepts that have been 'properly' defined elsewhere, the scenarios offered by the films have to be treated as conceptually laden. This enables us to trace the ways in which the films' scenarios actively engage with the philosophical imaginary, reinstating, destabilizing and reworking its theoretical concepts.

My expansion of Le Doeuff's position and methodology can be seen to set up the possibility of a dialogue between philosophical and filmic texts, thus providing a way of reading *The Matrix Trilogy* that focuses on the theoretical work done by the films themselves. I am not interested in

²⁸ Le Doeuff, 'Preface: the shameful face of philosophy', p. 4.

²⁹ Ibid. The imagery of crystallization used here is my own.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

³¹ Le Doeuff argues that Ibn Tufayl's philosophical imagery is put into wider circulation by Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Ibid., pp. 19–20.

³² Ibid., p. 4. See also Le Doeuff's essay 'Long hair, short ideas' from the same volume, pp. 100–28.

³³ The technique of using brief references to *The Matrix* as a means of launching a critique of the chosen theory/theorist, which has very little to do with the film, is displayed throughout the Irwin volume. See particularly, Erion's and Smith's general discussion of scepticism, 'Skepticism, morality and *The Matrix*', pp. 22–4; Holt's analysis of materialism, 'The machine-made ghost: or, the philosophy of mind, Matrix style', pp. 66–74, and Bassham's general arguments about pluralism in Geoffrey Bassham, 'The religion of *The Matrix* and the problems of pluralism', in Irwin (ed.) *The Matrix and Philosophy*, pp. 111–25, pp. 119–25.

³⁴ This approach is taken up by Richard Hanley in his essay 'Simulacra and simulation: Baudrillard and *The Matrix*', which was added to the official website on 19 December 2003.

³⁵ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 126.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

using the films as a springboard for advancing my own critique of Baudrillard's position.³³ I will provide an analysis of a particular aspect of Baudrillard's characterization of the hyperreal in *Simulacra and Simulation* that focuses on unpacking the imagery, rather than dismissing it as deliberate obfuscation.³⁴ This will be followed by an analysis of corresponding scenarios from the films and an assessment of the ways in which the filmic imagery adapts the Baudrillardian concepts and arguments, restating or challenging and changing them. This expansion of Le Doeuff's methodology thus enables me to move away from the widely held misconception of change as a distortion of the philosophical source material and to concentrate instead on assessing the conceptual significance of the scenarios presented by the films.

Baudrillard argues that the current postmodern condition is the result of a crisis in the relation between reality and the image. The traditional mimetic relation between the two, in which the image was judged to be a more or less accurate copy of reality, has broken down. Instead, reality is now seen to be a copy of the image. This inversion of the mimetic relation results in the precession of simulacra – the image and the model – and the loss of the real. Utterly permeated by the image, reality has become the *hyperreal*. Baudrillard argues that contemporary science fiction has also helped to expand the domain of the hyperreal in that it plays out the loss of the opposition between reality and fiction. As a result 'science fiction . . . is everywhere' in that the news sounds like one of J.G. Ballard's scenarios.³⁵ This is a good example of the precession of simulacra in that the scenarios generated by science fiction inform the experience of viewing the news, fiction infusing reality, thus blocking any access to the real. In turn, the news itself becomes a form of science fiction, utterly undermining the dichotomy of reality/fiction, and thereby demonstrating the reversible, circular logic that characterizes the hyperreal.

The lack of differentiation between reality/fiction that science fiction helps to bring about also affects the genre itself. Baudrillard argues that it is no longer possible for current science fiction to explore a range of parallel, double or possible universes because such distinctions are eliminated within the single, all-encompassing 'universe of simulation' that constitutes the hyperreal.

Science fiction has always . . . played on the double . . . either artificial or imaginary, whereas here the double has disappeared, there is no longer a double, one is always already in the other world, which is no longer an other, without a mirror, a projection, or a utopia that can reflect it – simulation is insuperable, unsurpassable, dull and flat, without exteriority – we will no longer even pass through to 'the other side of the mirror', that was still the golden age of transcendence.³⁶

Within the hyperreal, mirrors do not function as reflective surfaces, setting up the possibility of a space beyond as in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. The distinction between the real and dream

worlds, between interiority and exteriority has been lost, thus removing the possibility of escaping from the universe of simulation.

Earlier in *Simulacra and Simulation* Baudrillard uses the image of a curved mirror to explore the political implications of the reversible, circular logic of the hyperreal. He argues that the implosion of the distinction between right and left means that 'every act is terminated at the end of the cycle having benefited everyone and having been scattered in all directions'.³⁷ In this way, a bombing in Italy can be interpreted as the work of left-wing extremists, right-wing extremists or the centralized government attempting to discredit all such groups and shore up its own power; all hypotheses being equally 'true' thanks to the implosion of dialectical polarity within the hyperreal.³⁸ He goes on to conclude that any political system is conjoined to its 'extreme alternative like the two sides of a curved mirror, a vicious curvature of a political space that is henceforth magnetized, circularized, reversibilized from the right to the left . . . the infinity of capital folded back on its own surface'.³⁹ Here it is the hyperreal itself that is presented as a mirror, an image that foregrounds its status as simulation. It is not possible to travel to the other side of the mirror because we are always already trapped within a circle, visually presented by the curving sides of the mirror space.

The critics who argue that *The Matrix* misrepresents Baudrillard's position – by far the majority – attack the film for maintaining clear distinctions between illusion/reality and delusion/truth, which is said to demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of the concept of the hyperreal.⁴⁰ Baudrillard also subscribes to this view, although the substance of his critique is more difficult to gauge.⁴¹ Andrew Gordon follows through this line of argument, reading the scene in which Neo takes the red pill as an inversion of *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Wizard of Oz*. He argues that, unlike Alice and Dorothy, who move from the real to a dream world, Neo progresses from the dream world to reality. The dissolving mirror is also read as an inversion of *Alice Through The Looking Glass* in that it acts as a passageway to the real world on the other side of it.⁴² In this way, *The Matrix* is seen to offer 'the hope of returning to the real' and thus to misrepresent Baudrillard's position.⁴³

Part of the problem with Gordon's reading is contained within the dialogue that he quotes to support it. Morpheus offers Neo the choice between the red and blue pills saying: 'You take the red pill and you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.' Rather than inverting the structures of *Alice in Wonderland*, the references make the alleged journey to the real profoundly ambiguous in that the choice of the red pill marks the beginning of the space of adventure, thus paralleling Alice's journey. Moreover, the speaker is a character named after the god of dreams, who is described in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* as 'a master at simulating humans, at counterfeiting men'.⁴⁴ The intertextual elements that might disrupt Morpheus' status as the voice of truth are expanded in the second film, which presents him as a dreamer who attempts to persuade others to share his vision of the world. Finally, the

³⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 16–17.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

⁴⁰ See for example: D. Lavery, 'From cinespace to cyberspace: zionists and agents, realists and gamers in *The Matrix* and *eXistenZ*', pp. 155–6; and R. Hanley, 'Simulacra and simulation: Baudrillard and *The Matrix*', on *The Matrix* official website.

⁴¹ Baudrillard attacks the first film of the trilogy for maintaining the concept of the real and the second for not having any conception of the real. Jean Baudrillard, 'Interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur*'. <http://www.teaser.fr/~icolombet/empyree/divers/Matrix-Baudrillard> (accessed 12 December 2003).

⁴² A. Gordon, 'The Matrix: paradigm of postmodernism or intellectual poseur, part two', p. 112.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 119–20.

⁴⁴ This is Felluga's gloss of Ovid in 'The Matrix: paradigm of postmodernism or intellectual poseur, part one', in Yeffeth (ed.) *Taking the Red Pill*, pp. 85–101, p. 93.

45 These reflections were added digitally in postproduction. Spencer Lamm (ed.), *The Art of the Matrix* (London: Titan Books and WB Publishing, 2000), p. 62.

46 Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (New York, NY: Random House, 1992), p. 173.

47 Russell J. A. Kilbourn, 'Re-writing "reality": reading *The Matrix*', *The Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2000), pp. 43–54, p. 48.

48 Ibid. I disagree with Kilbourn here – he reads Neo's death and rebirth within the vat as 'a negative instance of the reality principle' and thus argues that *The Matrix* upholds the reality/illusion dichotomy.

49 While Danahay and Rieder parallel the two realms, they offer a Marxist reading of *The Matrix* in which the coppertops are seen to constitute the film's economic 'reality'. Martin A. Danahay and David Rieder, 'The Matrix, Marx, and the coppertop's life', in Irwin (ed.) *The Matrix and Philosophy*, pp. 216–24, p. 219.

visual presentation of the choice in an extreme close-up of Morpheus' implacable face, each hand with its proffered pill reflected in the lenses of his mirrored sunglasses, does not set up a contrast between reality and illusion.⁴⁵ Indeed, Neo appears to choose between two different hallucinogenic trips – a reading that is sustained by the respective mise-en-scenes of the two worlds: the cocaine chic of the 1980s corporate culture that is the matrix, vs the heroin chic of the 1990s grunge aesthetic that is the Nebuchadnezzar, suggesting that both are equally illusory.

Importantly, Neo's confrontation with the liquid mirror in *The Matrix* differs significantly from the details of the Lewis Carroll story in which the glass appears 'to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist', allowing access to the world beyond it.⁴⁶ Neo does not go through the looking glass to a reality on the other side, instead, the shimmering viscous substance travels up his arm and over his body, finally disappearing down his throat and thus transforming him into a mirror. Russell Kilbourn reads Neo's merging with the mirror as an illustration of 'the subject's assimilation by Baudrillard's simulacrum, effacing the distinction between the subject's organic authenticity and its reflection, as if reality were continuous with the mirror's depthless surface'.⁴⁷ I would add that the transformation draws on Baudrillard's image of the reversible logic of the hyperreal. Neo is constructed as a mirrored surface that curves over on itself, undoing the opposition between inside and outside. In this way, the filmic imagery can be seen to convey the conceptual implications of the philosophical imaginary in that dialectical opposites are rendered equivalent within the mirror space.

The undermining of the opposition between interiority/exteriority that characterizes the transformation serves to contain Neo within the mirror space, suggesting that his death/rebirth in the vat does not constitute an escape from the matrix's world of simulation, but rather marks a transition to another realm within the hyperreal.⁴⁸ The parallel between the matrix and the realm of the vats is visually reinforced by the presence of high-rise, metallic, architectural structures in both places. Martin Danahay and David Rieder comment that 'the power plant is reminiscent of a corporate building, all of its workers neatly stacked in cubicles, one floor on top of the next'.⁴⁹ This sense of the way in which Neo simply moves between different hyperreal realms is made explicit during the meeting with the Architect at the end of the second film. The visual transition to the space of the meeting shows Neo stepping through the doorway of light and heading towards the heavens, which flicker, suggesting he has passed through the constellations that form the skies of the matrix, only to find he is contained within the curved contour of a flickering television screen and that his escape is merely a visual glitch. The transition makes clear the impossibility of accessing a space exterior to the universe of simulation represented by the matrix. This is confirmed by the Architect, who tells Neo that, far from being beyond or above the system, he is in fact its preset failsafe device. Moreover, the television screen is immediately reconstructed as a mirror, in that Neo is confronted

by a wall of screens playing multiple images of previous versions of himself, thus consolidating the presentation of the hyperreal as an inescapable mirror space.

The first two films can therefore be seen to make use of the image of the mirror to indicate a universe of simulation that is without exteriority, clearly drawing on Baudrillard's philosophical imagery. However, they draw back from presenting the mirror as an end point. In Baudrillard's work the image of the mirror curving over on itself, imploding dialectical opposition, is also the visual demarcation of a final zero, signifying the end of meaning and choice within the hyperreal. The possible, alternative, differential worlds of science fiction are merged into the single universe of simulation with the result that there are no possibilities or alternatives any more. *The Matrix Trilogy* reintroduces the concept of the differential into its version of the hyperreal. This is done through the presentation of a series of hyperreal worlds: the matrix, the vats, Zion and the machine city, among others. These constitute stages of progression across the narrative and can thus be seen to correspond to the different levels of a video game. The use of the video game aesthetic is very clear in the second film in which Neo progresses towards the final meeting with the Architect via the back doors provided by the matrix program. The introduction of the concepts of difference and progression to the hyperreal means that *The Matrix Trilogy* can be seen to draw on Baudrillard's imagery without promulgating his nihilism – I will return to this point at the end of the article.

Baudrillard's characterization of the hyperreal in *Simulacra and Simulation* also utilizes material from Greek mythology, specifically the figures of Orpheus and Eurydice. An analysis of the role played by these images is consistent with Le Doeuff's methodology in that she suggests that a proper analysis of Plato's imagery would have to look carefully at the conceptual implications of his reworking of specific myths and legends.⁵⁰ Baudrillard draws a number of different parallels between the figure of Eurydice and the hyperreal, which focus on the last part of the mythic material. In the myth, Eurydice, Orpheus' young wife, was bitten by a snake and taken down to Hades. Refusing to accept her death, Orpheus pursued her and descended into the underworld where 'he sang and played so movingly that the spirits [of the dead] came in hordes to listen, the damned forgot their labors for a moment, and even the cold hearts of Hades and Persephone were melted'.⁵¹ The couple granted Orpheus' wish to take Eurydice back with him provided that he promised not to look at her before they had returned home. Famously, Orpheus was unable to resist the temptation to look back and thus caught a final glimpse of Eurydice as she disappeared among the shades, fading away to be lost to him forever.

Baudrillard's initial use of the myth focuses on Eurydice's second death in which she is constructed as a vanishing point. Writing about the science of ethnology he argues that its mode of study is inextricably linked to the death of its chosen object, which moreover, enables the

50 Le Doeuff, 'Preface: the shameful face of philosophy', p. 5.

51 Edward Tripp, *Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1988), p. 435.

52 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 7.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., p. 8. My emphasis – the last three words in the sentence are italicized in the original text.

55 Ibid., pp. 46–7.

56 Ibid., p. 47.

57 Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and consumer society', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto, 1985), pp. 111–25, p. 118.

58 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 48. My emphasis.

59 Ibid., p. 9.

object to evade such scientific classification. This paradox is said to be the condition of all science, which is 'doomed by the evanescence of its object in its very apprehension, and by the pitiless reversal that the dead object exerts on it . . . Like Orpheus it always turns round too soon, and, like Eurydice, its object falls back into Hades.'⁵² In this first reference to the myth, Eurydice is presented as the prototype of an object that is irretrievably lost, both inciting and evading scientific investigation. In an attempt to find a way out of the paradox, ethnologists have proposed the preservation of their precious objects by positioning them beyond science. Baudrillard interprets the scientists' and government's decision to return the Tasaday Indians to 'their primitive state' as an attempt to prevent the death of the object by preserving the real in an uncontaminated form. However, ethnology's 'simulated sacrifice of its object in order to save its reality principle' results, of course, in precisely the reverse.⁵³ The Tasaday becomes '*the model of simulation* of all the possible Indians from before ethnology'.⁵⁴

For Baudrillard, any attempt to preserve or recreate the real is always doomed to failure. He traces the trajectory of the second option in his discussion of cinema. Cinema's attempt to achieve 'an absolute correspondence with the real' through 'its banality, its veracity, in its naked obviousness, in its boredom' simply results in its achieving 'an absolute correspondence with itself . . . the very definition of the hyperreal'.⁵⁵ The hyperreal is thus sustained by the current proliferation of remakes that are more perfect than the original films, which he argues indicates that 'the cinema is fascinated by itself as a lost object as much as it (and we) are fascinated by the real as a lost referent'.⁵⁶ Like Jameson, Baudrillard argues that cinema is responsible for the loss of history, offering an imagistic reconstruction that simply serves as a reminder of the impossibility of returning to the past.⁵⁷ 'Today cinema can place all its talent, all its technology in the service of reanimating what it itself contributed to liquidating. *It only resurrects ghosts*, and it itself is lost therein.'⁵⁸

As the prototype of the lost object Eurydice symbolizes the loss of the real and the loss of history as well as the loss of a naive conception of cinema as a direct representation of the real. However, Eurydice's inevitable death is also seen to affect those who take up the role of Orpheus: 'science can't help but die contaminated by the death of this object that is its inverse mirror'.⁵⁹ While the death of the real creates the hyperreal, it, in turn, is reconstructed as a space that is populated by ghosts. Any attempt to preserve or recreate the real only results in the creation of pale imitations/simulations of that which is always already lost. Cinematic reconstructions of the past are said to resurrect ghosts, furthering the proliferation of simulacra. Here, Eurydice's second transformation into a fading shade becomes an imitation of her first death, representing the process of becoming a simulacrum. She thus plays two roles, both a vanishing point that symbolizes the inevitable

disappearance of the real, and a twice-dead ghostly shade that represents the reconstruction of the real as simulation.

The Matrix Trilogy does not offer a direct representation of Baudrillard's figure of Eurydice, focusing instead on another mythical female figure who traditionally functions as a lost object, Persephone. In the Greek myth, Persephone was abducted by Hades. Her mother, Demeter, searched for her in sorrow and while she grieved brought famine to the earth for a year. Zeus, fearing an insurrection against the gods, ordered Hades to return Persephone, who was then reunited with her mother.⁶⁰ However, as Persephone had eaten food in the underworld she had to return to Hades for one third of every year. The myth thus sets up the cycle of the seasons, Persephone's return to Demeter marking the onset of spring.⁶¹

The Matrix Trilogy omits all references to Demeter and indeed to nature, focusing on the partnership between Persephone and Hades (represented as The Marovingian). The couple are sensualists, 'connoisseurs of the finer things in life', who between them savor fine wines, languages – specifically swearing in French – and intense emotion.⁶² Both only ever appear within the matrix, suggesting that there is no space of nature outside the urban underworld to which Persephone could escape. Moreover, the mise-en-scene gives their stated desire to 'sample' delightful sensations a different aspect, in that within the universe of simulation such things are always already sampled – a copy of a copy that marks the destruction of the authentic original.

Importantly, Persephone does not play Eurydice's role of lost object, instead she is shown to be on a quest of her own, thus becoming another Orpheus.⁶³ Persephone's lost object is The Marovingian's love and she seeks its restoration by 'sampling' the intense emotion experienced by Neo and Trinity. She requests that Neo kiss her as though he were kissing Trinity, saying: 'You love her; she loves you. It's all over you both. A long time ago I knew what that felt like. I want to remember it. I want to sample it.' Her voice lightens as she adds: 'That's all – just a sample'. The repetition of the word suggests that Neo cannot function as a vehicle for recreating the emotional intensity that once characterized her own relationship; instead the recreation will mark its reconstruction as simulation.

This reading is complicated by the visual details of the scene. Persephone claims to be interested in reliving the emotion associated with the early years of her marriage; the brief pause before she says 'I want to remember it' in which she glances up and down the length of Neo's body suggests that the act of kissing him may well be a pleasure in itself. The second, successful kiss makes use of a number of well-known cinematic signs of emotional authenticity: Neo removes his glasses (but does not let down his hair) and closes his eyes before embracing Persephone. The two extreme close-ups of their lips locked together, which mark the beginning and end of the embrace, also suggest emotional intensity. This is reinforced further by the reaction shot of

⁶⁰ Tripp, *Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, pp. 194–8, 463–4.

⁶¹ For a discussion of the cyclical Demeter myth and Nietzsche's eternal return see Constable, *Thinking in Images*, pp. 93–4, 103–107.

⁶² Lawrence, *Like a Splinter in Your Mind: The Philosophy Behind the Matrix Trilogy*, p. 159.

⁶³ This complication suggests that the roles allocated to the female characters throughout the trilogy may not be as regressive as some critics have implied. See, for example, Cynthia Freeland, 'Penetrating Keanu: new holes but the same old shit', in Irwin (ed.), *The Matrix and Philosophy*, pp. 205–15, pp. 209–10; and Peter Lehman and William Luhr, *Thinking About Movies: Watching, Questioning, Enjoying Second Edition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) chapter 16, pp. 353–75, pp. 368–9.

64 Lawrence reads Persephone's desire for pure sensation as demonstrative of a kind of existential authenticity. *Like a Splinter in Your Mind: The Philosophy Behind the Matrix Trilogy*, pp. 159–61.

Trinity that occurs between the extreme close-ups, showing her visible disquiet. Persephone's breathy response, 'Yes, that's it', as she draws away from Neo, biting her bottom lip as if to savor the sensation once again, suggests that the simulation of emotion has had the effect of reconstructing the past for her.⁶⁴ The character's response is contrary to Baudrillard's position in which the reconstruction of the past can only ever mark the impossibility of returning to it. However, the visual representation of the kiss can be seen to conform to the Baudrillardian framework in that the 'authentic' emotion of true love has been reconstructed as a series of somewhat hackneyed cinematic signs.

Importantly, the visual presentation of the kiss with its surfeit of cinematic signifiers of authenticity places Persephone alongside Baudrillard's Eurydice in that both figures can be seen to play out a very similar logical move. On Le Doeuff's model, the change of imagery from Eurydice to Persephone should result in a substantial alteration of the concomitant theoretical concepts. However, the changes made to the mythic material concerning Persephone result in a key similarity. Both figures are associated with a particular kind of repetition: Eurydice's second death marking the reconstruction of the real as simulation and Persephone's re-enactment of being in love resulting in the reconstruction of emotion as a series of simulated signs.

The presentation of the matrix in the second film draws more generally on Baudrillard's image of the hyperreal as a haunted space in that it is populated by simulacra that are ghost-like. In *The Matrix Reloaded* ghosts are said to be rogue programs that have avoided exile or deletion and continue to exist within the mainframe, disrupting the seamless presentation of the world of the matrix. The Oracle identifies a number of such programs in conversation with Neo, including angels, vampires, werewolves and aliens. After the kiss, Persephone helps Neo, Morpheus and Trinity to rescue the Keymaker, introducing them to several rogue programs along the way. She kills one of the two henchmen who are found watching *Brides of Frankenstein* with a silver bullet, dispatching the other to warn her husband. While the vampire in the film clip is in the process of transforming, the surprised werewolves/henchmen are not given the opportunity, the presentation of different stages of metamorphosis serving to construct them all as simulacra. The next confrontation with the Merovingian and his forces briefly features the twins whose extremely pallid features, powder white dreadlocks and white clothing gives them a ghostly appearance. This proves to be indicative of their abilities in that they pursue the Keymaker by becoming transparent and passing through solid objects, dissolving and disappearing into the floor. While Persephone comments that the Merovingian has maintained the old programs because they are difficult to kill, this hardly differentiates them from their adversaries – Trinity, Morpheus, Neo and the agents all possess similarly supernatural powers within the matrix. Importantly, the ghosts are not presented as the opposite of the 'living' in that they are all programs. As a result, they

65 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 6.

have the same conceptual function as Eurydice in that they act as shades that display the ghost-like aspects of simulation, thus constructing the hyperreal as a space of imitation in which everyone is always already dead and resurrected.⁶⁵

The Matrix Revolutions picks up more directly on the myths pertaining to Persephone, presenting the Merovingian and his wife in a modern version of Hades. However, the mythological material is fused with elements of Christian symbolism and I will set out the filmic imagery and then comment on the ways in which it effects a shift away from Baudrillard's position. Persephone and The Merovingian are visited by Morpheus, Trinity and Seraph, who wish to rescue Neo from imprisonment in the subway, a plot line that inverts the traditional gendering of Orpheus' and Hercules' respective quests to recover Eurydice and Alcestis from the confines of the underworld. The underground entrance to 'Club Hel' is positioned in a car park and the lift is the central feature of an indented archway that is lit by red down-lighters so that it resembles the mouth of a cave. The name of the club is conveyed through an extreme close-up of the bright red lift button that Morpheus presses to get there. The lettering on it should read 'HELP' but the 'P' is so pockmarked as to be scarcely visible. The repetition of reds in the lighting and the lift fuses Greek with Christian mythologies, combining the underworld with hell fire and damnation.

The fusion of the two traditions is also apparent in the presentation of the Merovingian who takes up the role of Hades, presiding over his underworld kingdom and deciding who lives or dies by determining who will or will not be able to leave it. The lighting throughout the scene also constructs him as demonic – clearly referencing the Christian tradition. The dance floor of the club is intermittently lit up by the rays of a laser that play across it, resulting in a strobe effect of green light. The balcony above is the site of the confrontation between the Merovingian and Neo's rescuers. The close-ups of the Merovingian's face are illuminated by the strobe effect coming from his right, which alternates between white side-lighting and a darker, green-hued light.⁶⁶ This darkness falls across his features twice during the short take in which he asks for the eyes of the Oracle. While the green laser should affect all those on the balcony, the close-ups of Neo's rescuers show that their faces are consistently lit by white side-lighting, unaffected by the play of green light to their left. The contrast between the white light that appears to emanate from each member of the rescue party, presenting the trinity as angelic, and the green hued darkness inhabited by the Merovingian, clearly sets up an opposition between good and evil.

The moral categories that are retained through the lighting set ups within the scene in Hades are supported by the religious imagery that is used across the trilogy. The presentation of the dialectic of good/evil marks a key point of divergence from the Baudrillardian source material in which all polarities are undermined by the circular, reversible logic of the hyperreal. For Baudrillard, the attempt to resurrect 'the divine

66 The Merovingian's presentation within the green-hued light associated with the matrix code also recalls his position as one of its oldest programs.

67 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 5.

68 Ibid., p. 153.

69 Ibid.

70 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in Walter Kaufmann (ed. and trans.), *The Portable Nietzsche* (London: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 137–40.

71 Ibid., p. 139.

72 Ibid.

73 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 1.

74 For an excellent reading of the ways in which the mise-en-scene undoes the very concept of 'the real' see Felluga, 'The Matrix paradigm of postmodernism or intellectual poseur, part one', p. 93.

referential' that is the basis of Christianity is doomed to fail in the same way as all the other attempts to recreate the/a real.⁶⁷ They simply serve to generate a series of ghosts: 'the phantom of value still floats over the desert of the classical structures of capital, just as the phantom of religion floats over a world now long desacralized'.⁶⁸ Within the Baudrillardian framework, the deployment of religious iconography can only ever play out the death of God, reconstructing the divine as a simulacrum – a copy of an icon – a move that underpins the conception of the hyperreal as a fundamentally amoral space. The challenge the hyperreal presents is how to continue to live *without* the aid of such simulated phantoms: 'It is up to us to again become the nomads of this desert, but disengaged from the mechanical illusion of value'.⁶⁹

In comparing the valueless hyperreal to a desert landscape, Baudrillard draws on a particular tradition within the philosophical imaginary. Nietzsche uses the image of the desert in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* as a setting for the three metamorphoses required for man to become a creator of new values: becoming camel, lion and finally a child.⁷⁰ The camel speeds into the desert – the biblical setting for trials of spiritual endurance. Once there the camel becomes a lion, whose strength is necessary to slay the ancient dragon 'thou shalt', a representative of the commandments and all Judaic–Christian values. 'The creation of freedom for oneself and a sacred "No" even to duty – for that . . . the lion is needed'.⁷¹ In order to will new values the lion must become a child: 'a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes"'.⁷² The key transition for Nietzsche is the change from negation to affirmation, from the lion's destructive strength to the child's creation of new values. This marks the final dismantling of transcendent systems of value that are imposed from the outside to the new systems that are generated by the child/overman and thus centered within the self. In contrast, Baudrillard remains at the second stage of pure negation in that the death of God simply marks the end of all values.

The difference between the two philosophers is evident from their depictions of the desert: one viewing it as a desolate and haunted space, the other constructing it as a site of struggle and creative contemplation. *The Matrix Trilogy* does not really take up the desert imagery that is part of the philosophical tradition. The only direct reference is Morpheus's line 'welcome to the desert of the real', during his explanation of the nature of the matrix to Neo.⁷³ However, the dialogue is accompanied by television images of a blasted urban landscape, which, though desolate, do not draw directly on the philosophical imaginary.⁷⁴ The films raise the whole question of value through their utilization of scores of religious references, which fuse Greek, Buddhist and Christian mythologies. I will focus now on the Christian subtexts, in order to consider whether the conceptual implications of the films' take-up of religious imagery are consistent with Baudrillard's arguments. If so, the Christian subtexts will constitute nostalgic attempts to re-evoke the divine that simply result in

the proliferation of phantoms, which, in turn, signal the destruction of all value.

There are numerous articles on *The Matrix* that construct the film's narrative as a Messianic trajectory. Read Mercer Schuchardt argues that Morpheus' confession of his life-long search for Neo presents him as John the Baptist.⁷⁵ Like John, he is mistaken for the Messiah when his function is to prepare a path for him. Gregory Bassham continues the parallel, commenting that 'Neo is "baptized" in the human battery refuse tank by Morpheus and the crew of the *Nebuchadnezzar*' just as Jesus was baptized by John.⁷⁶ Paul Fontana argues that Neo is betrayed by Cypher, who can therefore be seen to play the role of Judas, although his reward is a good dinner and a future as 'somebody important, like an actor' rather than thirty pieces of silver.⁷⁷ (Others compare Cypher to the devil.)⁷⁸ Neo's readiness to sacrifice himself to save Morpheus, thereby also saving all the inhabitants of Zion, is said to parallel Christ's decision to die to save mankind.⁷⁹ Neo's resurrection in room 303 through Trinity's kiss recalls the three days between Christ's death and his resurrection in the garden.⁸⁰ Fontana quotes Paul's letter to the Corinthians in which the material body is contrasted with the resurrected body, the latter being described as 'imperishable' and 'raised in power'.⁸¹ These qualities are then seen to characterize the glowing, post-resurrection Neo, who cannot be hurt, given the newly found powers that enable him to stop bullets, engage Agent Smith in combat while keeping one arm behind his back, and enter Smith's body, causing him to explode into fragments of green light.⁸²

For Baudrillard, this profusion of parallels should function as an attempt (albeit misguided) to revive the Christian concept of a transcendent divinity. This argument is upheld by Fontana's theistic reading of *The Matrix* in which he endeavours 'to observe God's presence in the general flow of the film'.⁸³ His presence is said to be indicated through the presentation of three miracles: Tank's revival in time to prevent Cypher from killing Neo, the successful rescue of Morpheus and Neo's resurrection from the dead.⁸⁴ However, this theistic interpretation and the other Messianic readings are clearly problematized by the developments across the trilogy as a whole. Trinity replays Neo's death and miraculous resurrection in the second film, a reversal that Paul Condon argues constructs her as Christ-like, resulting in an unprecedented proliferation of messianic figures.⁸⁵ Neo's encounter with five previous versions of himself during his meeting with the Architect, clearly suggests that his death and resurrection has occurred five times before, thus preventing it from having the status of a miracle in that it is not a unique event. Moreover, the film offers an alternative explanation for his continual revival in that his role of failsafe makes him an integral part of the mechanism whereby the system reboots. The third film presents a second version of Neo's sacrificial death – a repetition that means it can no longer be regarded as the 'ultimate sacrifice' to save mankind.

75 Read Mercer Schuchardt, 'What is the Matrix?', in Jeffeth (ed.), *Taking the Red Pill*, pp. 10–30, p. 12.

76 Bassham, 'The religion of the Matrix and the problems of pluralism', p. 112.

77 Paul Fontana, 'Finding God in The Matrix', in Jeffeth (ed.), *Taking the Red Pill*, pp. 189–219, p. 202.

78 See Schuchardt, 'What is the Matrix?' p. 15, and Bassham, 'The religion of the Matrix and the problems of pluralism', p. 113.

79 Fontana, 'Finding God in The Matrix', p. 197.

80 Bassham, 'The religion of the Matrix and the problems of pluralism', p. 112.

81 Fontana, quoting 1 Corinthians 15: 42b–43 in 'Finding God in The Matrix', p. 196.

82 Fontana, 'Finding God in The Matrix', p. 196. Bassham reads this scene as a form of resurrection and transfiguration, 'The religion of the Matrix and the problems of pluralism', pp. 112–13.

83 Fontana, 'Finding God in The Matrix', p. 211.

84 Ibid., pp. 212–13.

85 Paul Condon, *The Matrix Unlocked: An Unauthorised Review of the Matrix Phenomenon* (London: Contender Books, 2003), p. 72.

86 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 6.

87 'Anderson' is said to be derived from the Greek 'andr' meaning man, thus literally son of man. Condon, *The Matrix Unlocked*, pp. 65–6.

88 Bassham, 'The religion of the Matrix and the problems of pluralism', p. 118.

89 Michael Brannigan, 'There is no spoon: a Buddhist mirror', in Irwin (ed.), *The Matrix and Philosophy*, pp. 101–10, pp. 105–6.

90 The quotation is Larry and Andy Wachowski's definition of the presentation of faith in the first film. Quoted in Bassham, 'The religion of the Matrix and the problems of pluralism', pp. 115–16.

The patterns of inversion and repetition set up across the trilogy can be seen to present the divine as a copy of a copy, marking its reconstruction as simulation. Indeed, the resulting proliferation of messianic figures certainly recalls Baudrillard's conception of the hyperreal as a space in which 'every[one] is already dead and resurrected in advance'.⁸⁶ However, for Baudrillard the reconstruction of the divine referential as phantom is the result of the loss of the transcendent grounds on which the Judaic–Christian value system is based. By contrast, *The Matrix* offers a fundamental repositioning of the basis of Christian values, centering them *within* the individual characters. Neo's messianic trajectory takes the form of a transition from self-doubt to faith reflected in his changing name: from Thomas Anderson, which combines the figure of doubting Thomas, with the most human of the messianic titles, 'Son of Man'; to Neo, the 'One' who ushers in a new era.⁸⁷ Importantly, the transition is achieved through Neo's gaining faith in himself and his abilities, thus bearing out Bassham's observation that '*The Matrix* ... has a definite emphasis on the spiritual yet no reference to the divine'.⁸⁸ The link between the messianic trajectory and gaining self-knowledge is also presented through the adoption of the Buddhist philosophy of 'freeing the mind' through the discipline of martial arts training.⁸⁹ The first film can therefore be seen to offer a vision of faith as popular psychology, 'faith in oneself', thus cutting away any conception of a transcendent divinity that lies outside of its system of representation.⁹⁰

For Baudrillard, the obliteration of the divine referential should lead inexorably to the loss of all value, sustaining the recognition that such things are no longer of any consequence within the hyperreal. While the presentation of a reiterative bricolage of religious references across *The Matrix Trilogy* foregrounds their status as simulation, the issue of value remains crucial to the characterization. All of the characters, whether they are presented as good or bad, are associated with particular value systems. Neo, Morpheus and Trinity can be seen to epitomize the values extolled in Corinthians: faith, hope and love, each taking up different roles across the trilogy. The Merovingian explicitly acknowledges the false nature of the sensations that he and Persephone so enjoy; yet both continue to prize particular sensory experiences over others. Agent Smith's critique of the insipid, illusory nature of human values, particularly love, in his final battle with Neo presents his own desire to obliterate the irrevocably human programs as a pure, pitiless, machinic crusade. The films can thus be seen to offer a Nietzschean way out of Baudrillard's nihilism in that the recognition that all values are illusory does not result in their destruction. Instead, such values become *necessary illusions* because they are intrinsic to the process of self-definition, enabling each character to become what they are.

The Matrix Trilogy can thus be seen to draw on many aspects of Baudrillard's depiction of the hyperreal. The details of the philosophical imaginary are most clearly seen in the films' construction of a universe of simulation through images of mirror spaces that are without exteriority.

91 For a detailed discussion of the films' engagement with Baudrillard's changing conception of nihilism see Catherine Constable, 'Baudrillardian revolutions: repetition and radical intervention in *The Matrix Trilogy*', in Stacey Gillis (ed.) *The Matrix Trilogy: Cyberpunk Reloaded* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), pp. 151–61.

The conceptual implications of Baudrillard's take-up of the Eurydice myth are presented via the figure of Persephone, whose endeavour to recreate true love results in its reconstruction as simulation. The films also take up Baudrillard's imagery directly in their depiction of the hyperreal as a realm that is haunted by phantoms. However, the trilogy manages to avoid replicating and endorsing the overwhelming nihilism that accompanies Baudrillard's characterization of the hyperreal by drawing on other cultural sources to create its key images.⁹¹ The inclusion of elements from video games results in a reconceptualization of Baudrillard's single, all-encompassing, universe of simulation as a series of differential worlds. The recognition of the simulated nature of all values does not lead to their destruction; instead the re-centring of the transcendent ground of value within individual characters across the trilogy results in the affirmation of the necessity of such illusions. These changes halt the nihilistic trajectory of Baudrillard's narrative, allowing *The Matrix Trilogy* to offer a reconceptualization of the hyperreal as a space of progression and potential.

In tracing the ways in which the trilogy both draws on and changes Baudrillard's work, I hope to have set out a new paradigm for mapping future encounters between philosophy and film. I have followed Le Doeuff's methodology in my reading of Baudrillard insofar as my analysis of the main lines of his argument is reliant on a close reading of key images and re/workings of mythological material within *Simulacra and Simulation*. In so doing, I have departed from Le Doeuff by focusing solely on the constructive role played by the images, rather than looking at them as possible points of destabilization within the text. This positive focus has been carried over to my analysis of the films in that I have been concerned to consider the theoretical implications of the films' imagery, asking what concepts does it create and sustain? I have charted the ways in which the trilogy takes up and adapts the Baudrillardian imagery, restating and changing his concepts and thereby creating something new; rather than reading any changes as merely deconstructive and thus ultimately containing them within a Baudrillardian frame. These alterations to Le Doeuff's methodology enable us to appreciate the films as much more than philosophical illustrations or failed critique; they enable us to begin to understand the films as a philosophical project in their own right. As a result, I would argue that *The Matrix Trilogy's* reconceptualization of the hyperreal as a space of pure simulation, in which progress is possible and values are viable, must be seen as a contribution to postmodern philosophy.

German film, European film: transnational production, distribution and reception¹

RANDALL HALLE

¹ Research for this essay was conducted while an NEH Senior Fellow at the Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies.

² Statistics drawn from *Filmstatistisches Jahrbuch*, Spitzenorganisation der Filmwirtschaft (Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft Baden, 2003).

During the 1990s the German audiovisual industry changed from a primarily state subsidized 'high cultural' didactic system to a market-oriented popular cultural entertainment system. At the beginning of the decade the German film industry had declined to a meager 5% of the national film market. It now set out to reach the broadest possible audience in the global film market. Many analysts and critics of German film viewed this shift negatively, yet a decade of film statistics show that from 1991 to 2001 German film production almost doubled, attendance rose 27%, and screening spaces expanded by 12%.² Perhaps most significantly, the German film industry expanded its share of the national box office (the sixth largest film market in the world) by over 10%, reaching up to 30% in some quartiles.

If this description makes it appear that these changes were national transformations, this is not the case at all. The significance of the transformation of the German film industry lies in the fact that it took place within larger processes of globalization. Thus, for example, if film production in Germany doubled in a decade, of the 84 feature films premiered in 2002, 39 were coproductions with non-German partners. All the Hollywood majors have opened affiliates in Germany, companies like Buena Vista and Deutsche Columbia Tristar have produced and distributed some of the most important German box-office hits, while Studio Babelsberg spent the decade as part of the French-based global media conglomerate, Vivendi Universal. In other words, the expansion of

the German film industry was not simply a market effect of globalization but also involved a process of conscious transnationalism. Germany is at the center of the European Union (EU) and this has had a particular effect on the film landscape. For instance, the expansion of screening spaces in Germany and the increased frequency of German films being screened derive in part from the EU program, Measures to Encourage the Development of the Audiovisual Industry (MEDIA). MEDIA has fostered the formation of a network of movie theatres subsidized by EU funds: over 1000 theatres in over 250 cities. In return for economic support, these theatres have committed themselves to screening at least 50% European productions at least 50% of the time. This step has guaranteed European films an outlet and meant that they do not all go directly to archival shelves!

Such changes in the ways in which German film production now works challenge conventional approaches to 'national' cinema. Take the example of Babelsberg Studios, which spent a decade as a minor holding in Vivendi Universal's overextended global media conglomeration. Babelsberg proved an attractive site for Leander Haußmann to film the successful *Sonnenallee* (1999) but also for *Enemy at the Gates* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 2001), *The Pianist* (Roman Polanski, 2002) and *Resident Evil* (Paul Andersen, 2002). These films relied on German funding, German production staff, German location sites, German actors, extras and technology. Yet from the perspective of traditional, nationally orientated film studies, only one of these films could be recognized as 'German'. The basic premise of the national film industry has shifted in a subtle but significant way: rather than German directors making German films, now industry experts speak of a film as 'made in Germany' or from 'location Germany' [*Standort Deutschland*].³ The move from 'made for Germans' to 'made in Germany' results in products that evade apprehension by national-orientated approaches.

Transnationalism, as a special instance of globalization, exceeds simple economic considerations. The following propositions offer a provisional definition of the term.

1. Transnational market expansion takes place in two directions, horizontally at the regional level and vertically into a unified trading block.
2. Transnationalism is marked by a cooperation and pooling of national resources that result in the unification of orientation and replication of structures throughout diverse regions. The unification of orientation eases the integration of the cooperating territories.
3. Transnational industries replace national competition with transnational synergy. As a particular and advanced instance of transnational organization, the EU actively draws national markets together, and in doing so it sublates their individual significance into a synergistic whole.

3 As brief examples, *Deutsche Welle*, uses the 'made in Germany' term as a serious descriptor. Cultural Minister Julian Nida-Rümelin opened the 51st Berlinale with a speech under the rubric *Standort Deutschland*. See 'Standort Deutschland', *Die Zeit*, vol. 7 (2001).

4. Globalization transforms social and political organization. *Transnationalism* designates particular socio-political ideational processes, or to put it more simply, a new imagining of community.
5. Film is the most significant marker of simultaneous economic and cultural transformations, a marker of both globalization and transnationalism. Transnational Europe preserves a national cinema, but as *Aufhebung* it recontextualizes that cinema, creating a break and radically changing its significance.

These arguments are elaborated in the following discussion of production, distribution, reception and aesthetics.

In Europe transnational vertical integration of *production* has intensified through expanded reliance on coproduction agreements. As mentioned earlier, almost half of German films released in 2002 were coproductions. (In Britain we can observe a similar trend: in 1997 only seven films were European coproductions; by 2002 there were ten times that number). Good economic and diplomatic relationships at the heart of Europe meant, in particular, the expansion of coproduction arrangements between France and Germany. Among many prominent film projects, *Amélie* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001) and *Astérix et Obélix* (Alain Chabat, 2002) but also *Das Versprechen/The Promise* (Magarethe von Trotta, 1995) and *Der Unhold/The Ogre* (Volker Schlöndorff 1996) were produced as German–French joint ventures. Coproduction arrangements with other countries accelerated as well, in part because the Council of Europe’s Eurimages program assists a European pooling of resources. Such support of a diverse network of European partners has the

Table 1. Co-productions with Eurimages and German Filmförderungsanstalt (FFA) [Federal Film Board]

Year	Number of FFA-supported Eurimages projects	Exemplary projects with percentages of German investment
2004	16	<i>Caché</i> (Michael Haneke, 10%), <i>Die Hochzeitsfeier</i> (Dominique Deruddere, 75%), <i>Palto – The Coat</i> (Kutlug Ataman, 35%), <i>Unkenrufe</i> (Robert Glinksi, 66%)
2003	21	<i>One Day in Europe</i> (Hannes Stöhr, 80%), <i>Alone with the Moon</i> (Sergei Bodrov, 70%), <i>Manderlay</i> (Lars van Trier, 10%)
2002	12	<i>Rosenstrasse</i> (Magarthe von Trotta, 93%), <i>Honey Baby</i> (Mika Kaurismäki, 80%), <i>ONO</i> (Malgorzata Szumowska, 65%)
2001	18	<i>Jester Till</i> (Eberhard Junckersdorf, 85%), <i>Veeru/ Khamosh Pani</i> (Sabiha Sumar, 60%), <i>Willy, the Silent Movie Pianist</i> (Ilona Ziok, 80%), <i>Dogville</i> (Lars van Trier, 6%)
2000	17	<i>Mostly Martha</i> (Sandra Nettelbeck, 56%), <i>Ein Deutscher Anatolier</i> (Manfred Blank, 61%), <i>Le Roi Danse</i> (Gérard Corbiau, 26%), <i>Va Savoir</i> (Jacques Rivette, 10%)
1999	19	<i>Semana Santa</i> (Pepe Danquart, 62%), <i>Dancer in the Dark</i> (Lars van Trier, 14%)

interesting effect that German producers can take credit for the recent boom in Danish and Austrian film as well as for helping to launch the careers of new directors from Eastern Europe and Turkey (see table 1).

Eurimages is only one example of an institution that seeks to support a reimagining of European community; more initiatives emerge continually. In 2000, for example, the European Film Academy, a German–French project, began to train and support new filmmakers with a commitment to coproductions. It also serves as a coordinating forum for film industry leaders from both countries. The dynamic of coproduction has led to complications in the designation of a film's country of origin. *Amélie* appeared as a German film at the Berlinale, while in Cannes organizers now simply refuse to give films national designations. This does not mean that transnational production undermines national production. On the contrary, it is resignified. Transnationalism can actually strengthen the production of national film. *Luna Papa* (Bakhtyar Khudonazarov, 1999), designated the first Tajik film, was almost solely financed through German funding. In *Luna Papa*, as with *Amélie*, the presence of the coproduction partners remains outside the projected national image. Precisely because participation in the products of these transnational arrangements is often opaque to the viewing public, the films appear as national films. *Amélie* was taken to be French; *Luna Papa* appeared to be Tajik.

Annually many more films are made than are chosen for *distribution* and this selection process by distributors ultimately determines what images circulate. In general, distribution companies do not have particular national commitments. Within any particular library percentages of national representation can vary widely, in the German case from 2% with a company such as Cine Distribution to 95% with Bavaria Film International. For that matter a German distributor who specializes in imports can work to the detriment of national film production by promoting foreign film screenings. The move into international export requires a great deal of daring calculation, which independent distributors are often unwilling to make, and there is a fundamental problem that popular domestic success does not guarantee exportability. A successful German genre film meets barriers in the USA, where audiences expect Europe to provide arthouse films. One could imagine a solution developing in which the industry produces comedies for the domestic market and tragedies for the international. These limitations are real and significant, but globalization and transnational arrangements have led to creative solutions.

Production companies like Zero Films,⁴ Claussen and Wöbke, X Filme Creative Pool⁵ and German Independents emerged in the 1990s to produce 'smart films' for the international market. They sought to participate in the success of US independent film with a model of mid-level to low-budget production that combines earlier tendencies of

4 Zero films, founded by Thomas Kufus and Martin Hagemann, began their success with the documentary film *A Tickle in the Heart* (Stefan Schwietert, 1996). They then brought out a series of films about the young generation of Turkish-Germans and other more recent immigrants, e.g. *Lola and Bilidikid* (Kutlug Ataman, 1999) and *April Children* [Aprilkinder] (Yüksel Yavuz, 1999).

5 X Filme has produced *Life Is All You Get* [Das Leben ist eine Baustelle] (Wolfgang Becker, 1997), *Winter Sleepers* [Winterschläfer] (Tom Tykwer, 1997), *Run Lola Run* [Lola Rennt] (Tom Tykwer, 1998), *Gigantic* [Absolute Giganten] (Sebastian Schipper, 1999), *The Princess And The Warrior* [Der Krieger und die Kaiserin] (Tom Tykwer, 2000), *Heidi M.* (Michael Klier, 2001) and *Good Bye Lenin!* (Wolfgang Becker, 2003) among others.

European arthouse cinema with classic genre cinema. German Independents describes its output thus:

German films that are true to the independent spirit, tell individual and personal stories and realize their visions in uncompromising ways are featured here. German Independents stands for filmmaking with an edge, an impact, a signature.⁶

Such national production companies consciously orient their work to a global market.

Run, Lola, Run (Tom Tykwer, 1998), for instance, was a coproduction of X Filme and German Independents. In the first week of its release in Germany, the film attracted 360,000 viewers, propelling it to third place on the German box office charts.⁷ German Independents then promoted the film through film festivals, building a 'buzz', networking and setting up extra screenings until the film found commercial distribution globally. The film thus traveled to festivals from Hong Kong to North America, gaining praise and momentum, winning the best foreign film award at Sundance in 1999 and, as a result, getting a distribution deal with Sony Pictures Classics. By the end of 1999 the film had 23 distributors and was playing in 37 countries. X Filme Creative Pool learned from this process and for *Good Bye, Lenin!* (Wolfgang Becker, 2003) began with an orientation to the world market. Its marketing made the film the first German hit in France in 20 years, bringing in 1.5 million cinema viewers.

Given the general caution of distributors, there is nonetheless an abundance of films that do not make it into broader distribution. Hence the role of the German Export Union (ExU) has expanded in recent years. ExU is the official trade association for the export promotion of German films.⁸ Its primary significance lies in its role as intermediary between domestic film production and international distribution, and it presently has nine representatives abroad.⁹ There are now 'Made in Germany' showcases at international film festivals such as Cannes, Locarno and Sundance, highlighting films that did not make it into the festival itself, while German film weeks are strategically organized in significant cities such as New York, Toronto, Tokyo and Buenos Aires. In many cities such weeks have become established parts of local film culture. The London and Paris events, for example, have grown increasingly in size and frequently sell out their screenings. Their organizers have expanded activities to include podium discussions and 'meet the filmmaker' sessions along with retrospectives of older German work. The London festival has generated sufficient interest to be taken on the road to other European cities.

What should again be underscored is that these activities are not simply national but are integrated vertically and horizontally in the larger European context. ExU belongs to the European Film Promotion office, an outgrowth of the MEDIA program.¹⁰ EFP draws 'the activities of various national film promotion agencies in Europe' into 'a pan-European platform to give European cinema and its filmmakers a higher

⁶ See http://www.bavaria-film-international.de/htmls/flash/frset_skip.html (accessed 10 July 2004).

⁷ See Michael Töteberg, 'Run, Lola, Run', *Szenenwechsel: Momentaufnahmen des jungen deutschen Films* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1999).

⁸ Begun as a part of the federal government, as with other formerly federal ventures it has recently taken on the form of a private-public joint venture. See <http://www.german-cinema.de/about/> (accessed 12 September 2004).

⁹ North America has two dedicated representatives. France, Great Britain, Italy, Spain and Japan have a dedicated representative each. Representatives in Hong Kong and Argentina serve the broad regions of Latin America and China and South East Asia.

¹⁰ Founded in 1997, the EFP grew out of a previous German institution, the European Film Distribution Office (EFDO).

11 The program now has members from twenty-three countries and presence at seven of the world's most significant international film festivals. Martin Blaney, 'European film promotion: together we're stronger', *Kino*, vol. 4 (2002), p. 4.

profile'.¹¹ German film week is followed in many places by French, Spanish and Italian weeks and so on. Rather than such events fostering national competition, this structural cooperation is designed for a transnational synergistic effect. French interest in German film, for example, helps foster interest in Austrian, Hungarian and Czech film.

Certainly, even with the most developed of transnational networks, not all images from Germany are equally marketable. It is important to recognize that some films are better prepared for transnational distribution than others. What makes *Good Bye, Lenin!* appealing to British audiences while *Das Wunder von Bern/The Miracle of Bern* (Sönke Wortmann, 2003) received little more than derision from the critics there? If the best transnational films may appear to be good examples of a national cinema, not all national films succeed transnationally. This raises issues of *reception*.

If, thanks to Export Union, German productions increasingly find their way to Britain, for example, this does not necessarily translate into an equivalent expansion of reviews of German films in the British press. And when British critics do write about German cinema, it is often surprising what they say. It is at this point that transnational initiatives and artefacts confront a particularly problematic barrier to the reimagination of European community. A survey of recent British reviews of German films shows clearly how cultural barriers still shape the British critical response to German cinema. While one might expect the expression of nationalist stereotypes in the tabloids, critics from *The Times*, *Guardian*, *Financial Times* and *Daily Telegraph* are equally quick to resort to national clichés and prejudices.

Reviews of German comedies customarily begin, for example, with derision at the very possibility of German humour. The reviewers of *Good Bye Lenin!* repeatedly reassured potential spectators that, although it might be hard to believe, this German film really was funny! *The Guardian*, a Europhile paper, recommended the Fifth London German Film Festival in these terms: 'Although it's hard to trust art from a country that still worships David Hasselhoff, a slew of film festivals have showered recent works with awards, so it's time we caught up'.¹² This is hardly an endorsement which would bring out enthusiastic spectators to the week-long series of screenings. Perhaps more worrisome are the recurring references to the Holocaust, often appearing without motivation given the film under review. In his *Financial Times* review of *The Miracle of Bern*, a soccer film set in 1954, Nigel Andrews thus went out of his way to admonish the director Sönke Wortmann to not forget Auschwitz.¹³

There are some signs that the German Film Festivals have begun to challenge the laziness of such reviewing. By the time of the fifth London festival, in 2002, most film critics for the major London papers were reporting the event, and some were beginning to show familiarity with the parameters of German film in their reviews. Daniel Rosenthal's 2003 review of *Nirgendwo in Afrika/Nowhere in Africa* (Caroline Link, 2002)

12 Phelim O'Neil, 'The guide: films: Fifth German Film Festival London', *The Guardian*, 23 November 2002, p. 18.

13 Nigel Andrews, 'The Miracle of Bern', *The Financial Times USA Edition*, 15 July 2004.

in the *Times*, for instance, provided comprehensive background of the German film industry's engagement with the question of the Holocaust, although what made his article stand out was its assumption of an unproblematic relationship between British critic and German film.

Contemporary German films offer far greater diversity than the country's Oscars record would suggest, from a hip thriller like *Run Lola Run* to the psychological drama of *The Experiment* or the gross-out teen comedy of *Ants in Their Pants*. Following *Nowhere in Africa's* triumph, even the most patriotic German commentators may qualify their celebrations by asking 'Will we ever win an Oscar with a film that doesn't mention the war?'¹⁴

Rosenthal establishes his credentials as critic by indicating an awareness of a broad spectrum of contemporary German film as well as specific historical knowledge of German film's relationship to the Academy of Motion Pictures. In the ensuing discussion he continues to offer background and insight while engaging seriously with the films at hand. In his 2003 *Guardian* review of *Goodbye Lenin!* Peter Bradshaw similarly positions the film in broader European traditions and raises general questions about representation and responsibility vis-a-vis totalitarian regimes,¹⁵ while Sukhdev Sandhu's *Daily Telegraph* review of the same film draws connections to *Amélie* and *Tillsammans/Together* (Lucas Moodysson, 2003).¹⁶ What is significant about the work of these three critics is that they do not automatically dismiss German films as products of a distant culture but, rather, take for granted in their discussion that they can be treated as an aspect of their own cultural sphere. Such reviews do thereby suggest a form of transnational cultural affiliation.

We could place films that strive toward European stories as an avant-garde of transnational filmmaking, and see in them the epitome of a transnational *aesthetic*, but what about the successful national film? If as has been repeatedly suggested the best transnational film appears as a good national film, then does national film production itself provide evidence of a transnational aesthetic? To conclude I will look more closely at *Goodbye, Lenin!* and *The Miracle of Bern*, two films which bear certain similarities beyond their country of origin.

Both films are set against historic backdrops of rapid change in German national circumstances. *Miracle* focuses on the unexpected World Cup victory by the West German team in 1954, which is popularly understood as a sign of the return of West Germany to the world stage. The film is a generic blend of sports film and family melodrama. *Goodbye Lenin!* tells the story of a mother-son relationship in East Germany complicated by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the GDR. It is a blend of domestic and political comedy. While these films were highly successful at the box-office in Germany, they also aspired to reach broad international audiences. In both films the filiative sphere reflects larger questions of affiliation and socio-political

14 Daniel Rosenthal, 'Screen time for Hitler', *The Times*, 3 April 2003: Section 2, 18.

15 Peter Bradshaw, 'Up against the wall', *The Guardian*, 25 July 2003, p. 14.

16 Sukhdev Sandhu, 'Full of Eastern promise. A devoted son tries to convince his bed-ridden mother that the Berlin Wall is still standing, in this poignant and beautifully observed comedy', *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 July 2003, p. 25.

possibilities. They accomplish a resolution of family conflict but the ending of *Miracle* restores the functioning nuclear family while *Good Bye Lenin!* ends with the dissolution of the nuclear family into larger families of choice. *Good Bye Lenin!* traverses its narrative trajectory primarily as a comedy, albeit without falling into culturally specific jokes. While not exactly slapstick, Alex's antics to meet deadlines and gather impossible resources, are certainly staples of film comedies. *Miracle* on the other hand moves in the somber tones of a weighty past, displays war-induced German suffering, thematizes soccer as the positive displacement of the mass hysteria of the Third Reich, and generally marks a shift in representations of the traumas of the survivors of the Nazi era. Still, it does not require any special knowledge of Germany or German history from its viewers and like *Goodbye Lenin!* makes sure to clarify most of the specific references.

In their narratives, then, both these films employ universalizing, transnational themes. Thorsten Schaumann, Head of Sales for Bavaria Film International, producers of *The Miracle of Bern* suggests that 'From an international point of view, it's the emotion that counts, the universal feeling the father and son evoke'.¹⁷ Stefan Arndt, the producer of the film and one of the founders of X-Filme, notes that it was the mother-son conflict as a point of universalizing interest that formed the weighted center of *Good Bye Lenin!*¹⁸ But if this clearly worked for the latter film, which received almost universal praise from critics in the UK (whose reviews did indeed focus primarily on the relationship between Christiane and Alex and Alex's attempt to do the right thing for his mother), it was not so successful for *Miracle*. Its postwar setting drew out a knee-jerk connection to the Third Reich (in the *Sunday Times*, for example), and its story was dismissed as both bombastic (*Daily Telegraph*) and clichéd (*The Times*).¹⁹

In *The Miracle of Bern* the combined resolution of family and national trauma suggested an expression of German triumphalism that shuts out transnational identification. Films since *Das Boot* (Wolfgang Petersen, 1981), at least, have shown that it is possible to win spectatorial sympathy and identification even with Nazi officers – as long as the film also incorporates sceptical distancing from all forms of chauvinism. *Good Bye Lenin!* concerns a moment of historic change and suggests the opening of possibilities which allow for different valences of spectatorial identification. *Miracle's* ultimately conservative recuperation of the German nuclear family, by contrast, proves a barrier to transnational identification.

Even if it was not ultimately successful we should not, however, discount the significance of films like *Miracle* as a transnational experiment. The move from 'made for Germans' to 'made in Germany' makes possible films that mark a subtle but significant aesthetic shift in the representation of the lives of Germans, of life in Germany. In the products of transformed national film industries we find models for a reimagination of community. These films engage in a transnational

17 Nora Fitzgerald, 'Nostalgia gives Germany the feel good factor', *The Financial Times*, 5 December 2003, p. 10.

18 Stefan Arndt, Unpublished interview with the author, 5 October 2004.

19 Tim Robey, 'Also showing', *The Daily Telegraph* 16 July 2004, p. 17. John McNamara, 'The Miracle of Bern', *The Times* 17 July 2004, p. 8.

decentring whereby ethnocentrism is replaced with intersubjective openness. They give rise to film narratives the resolutions of which take place not within the filiative national community but through the affiliative potential of the world community. Like the general audiovisual economy, they seek to replace national competition with synergistic stories that can serve as universalizing European stories and future transnational myths.

Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock (eds), *ITV Cultures: Independent Television Over Fifty Years*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005, 232 pp.

GLEN CREEBER

- 1 Edward Buscombe, *British Television: a Reader* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2000).
- 2 Bernard Sendall, *Independent Television in Britain: Volume 1, Origins and Foundation, 1946–62* (London: Macmillan, 1982).
Bernard Sendall, *Independent Television in Britain: Volume 2, Expansion and Change, 1958–68* (London: Macmillan, 1983).
- 3 Jeremy Potter, *Independent Television in Britain: Volume 3, Politics and Control, 1968–80* (London: Macmillan, 1989).
Jeremy Potter, *Independent Television in Britain: Volume 4, Companies and Programmes* (London: Macmillan, 1990).
- 4 Paul Boner (with Lesley Aston), *Independent Television in Britain: Volume 5, ITV and IBA, 1981–92. The Old Relationship Changes* (London: Macmillan, 1998). Paul Boner (with Lesley Aston), *Independent Television in Britain: Volume 6, New Developments in Independent Television, 1981–9: Channel Four, TV-am, Cable and Satellite* (London: Macmillan, 2003).

While I welcomed the publication of Edward Buscombe's *British Television: a Reader*¹ in 2000, I was struck by its tendency to prioritize the BBC at the expense of other British television channels. Even a chapter concerned with the origins and arrival of ITV seemed more interested in the impact it had on the BBC than with the new television channel itself. So I was pleased to see the publication of this new academic book entirely devoted to independent television, appropriately enough in its fiftieth year. Of course, a volume of just over two hundred pages cannot give you a comprehensive account of the channel; for that you will need to turn to the expansive six volume 'official' history provided by Bernard Sendall,² Jeremy Potter³ and Paul Bonner and Lesley Aston.⁴ However, the publication of this single academic volume is perhaps a sign that the general obsession which British television studies once had with the BBC is now in decline. As crucially important as that institution is in British television history and culture as a whole, it is arguable that ITV does not play a less significant role.

The book is divided into three sections ('Histories', 'Institutions' and 'Texts and Intertexts') and covers many of the areas you would expect to find in such a collection, from the programmes themselves to the institutional, industrial and cultural contexts around which the programmes were made and consumed. Inevitably, not every aspect is covered (only four chapters are devoted to actual programmes, the advertisements themselves seem to be strangely absent and 'TV-am' does not even warrant a mention in the index), but there is enough here to offer a lively and interesting introduction to the field that may even

provoke wider critical debate. As the editors stress in their useful introduction, the book is 'unable to offer anything like a definitive account of ITV's history, or even any sense of a single ITV culture', but it does aim to 'establish commercial television as a legitimate object of future enquiry' (p. 7).

The opening chapter is also written by the editors and looks at the institutional history of ITV, from its founding principles all the way through to Ofcom's 'Phase 3 Report' in 2005. Of course, fifty years of broadcasting history is a long time to cover in a few thousand words (particularly when one considers the complexities of ITV's regulatory structure over the years) and the authors themselves acknowledge it as an 'impossible task' (p. 15). However, the chapter begins the volume with an essential overview which sets up many of the recurring debates that can be found throughout the book, regarding both the channel's ambiguous relationship with public service broadcasting and its national and regional obligations. Perhaps too brief for the more serious minded historian, I am convinced that students will find it (and the historical timeline also included) an accessible and interesting snap shot of the major issues and debates surrounding the channel's institutional development.

Another 'impossible task' is bravely taken on in Chapter 2, in which John Ellis discusses the pros and cons of constructing an ITV canon. I suspect this chapter was partly an attempt to name check a number of important shows that would not have been mentioned otherwise. Ellis is certainly careful to reference as many seminal programmes as possible while also self-reflexively discussing the very exercise he has embarked upon. I found his discussion of how much television programmes actually cost to make over the years particularly revealing. While an episode of *Coronation Street* from 1960 cost in the region of £1350 (apparently around £19,000 in today's money), an episode of the same soap opera from 2003 cost in the region of £90,000. According to Ellis, the 'uninformed observer' will therefore inevitably see earlier TV shows as 'cheap' and 'tacky' by today's standards (p. 52). This makes the construction of a canon for television particularly difficult, but it also reveals an important methodological insight – that television aesthetics can rarely be interpreted without taking into account their industrial production and context.

Jonathan Bignell is presented with a similar conundrum in his attempt to re-interpret the figure of Lew Grade, a Managing Director of Associated Television (ATV) – one of the first companies to hold a regional programming franchise within the ITV network. Arguing that he wants to produce a 'non-Oedipal' (p. 69) portrayal of this legendary businessman and raconteur, he nonetheless revisits familiar stories and anecdotal histories whilst skilfully suggesting that he is critically deconstructing them. However, I am not exactly sure what this 'deconstruction' offers us that is new, except perhaps to further

convince the reader that Grade really was an iconic, flamboyant and important figure in the development of British television.

I was surprised to find that there were no chapters on flagship ITV programmes such as *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*, *Armchair Theatre*, *The Avengers*, *News at Ten*, *World in Action* or even *Coronation Street* (also approaching its fiftieth year), but the programmes which are examined in detail offer a series of interesting analyses. I particularly enjoyed Helen Wheatley's piece on *Upstairs Downstairs* as it offers a real insight into a television drama long neglected by the academy. What surprised me most in her discussion was just how strongly the serial had apparently tackled questions about women's position in society, encompassing topics such as 'women's education and employment, changing expectations of marriage, domestic life, and divorce, women as desiring and sexual beings and the associated issues of women's health and abortion' (p. 152). Wheatley also examines the series as 'heritage' television and produces a fascinating description of its visual display of history. Notable for the way in which she illustrates large themes via detailed close readings, she examines one particularly awkward scene which seems to have been invented entirely to show off an Edwardian vacuum cleaner.

I also admired the attempt by Matt Hills to defend an often-derided genre – the quiz and game show. Focusing on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* Hills convincingly demonstrates how and explains why many television academics have traditionally been so distrustful of the popular and the commercial. Rather than assuming he knows what viewers derive from the show (which, he suggests, Marxist critiques have tended to do), he uses audience research to unlock and account for its 'popular aesthetics'. It is an erudite and unashamedly provocative piece, but one that addresses the overall themes and issues of the book extremely well whilst also focusing and illustrating those debates around one particularly pertinent case study.

Other programmes analysed in detail include an interesting discussion of the production and distribution context of *The Adventures of Robin Hood* by Steve Neale. A revealing account of one of ITV's earliest success stories, the series was first broadcast in the London region on 25 September 1955 and was eventually sold to America, Canada, Australia, Japan, Iran and Puerto Rico. Neale concentrates on the surprising amount of American involvement in both the programme's production and circulation. He reveals, as one critic at the time put it, an 'Anglo-American partnership' that had taken 'half a century to mature in motion pictures' but had 'been developed in the field of commercial television in just two years' (p. 82). At the other end of the historical spectrum Sherry Wilson examines the struggle between commercial forces and public service broadcasting at work in the contemporary 'magazine-therapy' show *Trisha*. Whilst she admits that the programme has a tendency to 'commodify suffering', she argues persuasively that it also 'provides a point of reference through which strategies for dealing with everyday life

and its difficulties are developed' (p. 160). Whatever the strength of her argument (and she is keen to explore its complexities), the mixture of detailed textual and contextual work on such a popular contemporary ITV programme is an important contribution to the book's overall themes and concerns.

The emphasis elsewhere is less on the programmes than on institutional and industrial history. For example, although Jackie Harrison's chapter is entitled 'From newsreels to a theatre of news: the growth and development of Independent Television News', she says little about how ITN actually revolutionized the content and presentation of British television news. Instead, the focus and strength of her article is provided by the amount of regulatory background that she discusses and with which she is able to demonstrate just how strongly ITN has been constrained by various organizational arrangements throughout its history. Rod Allen (once a senior producer and Controller of Development at London Weekend Television) produces a more intimate portrait of an ITV company from the inside. He remembers his time at LWT (1978–1986) as a rare moment in television history when industry awards 'such as BAFTAs and the Prix Italia, were seen as particular identifiers of quality: ratings were not so highly considered' (p. 110). I suspect some of his memories may have become a little rose-tinted over the years, but even he cannot completely gloss over this dark period in ITV's history when companies were taxed at the rate of 66.7 per cent of net domestic profits (*ibid.*). In addition, huge production costs and outmoded practices were still tightly enforced by enormously powerful trade unions. In fact he suggests that it was when LWT sent two OB vans and fifty technicians to Number 10 for a simple two-handed interview with the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, that she became really interested in the economics and business practice of ITV.

One of the most revealing chapters in the collection was Jamie Medhurst's informative piece on the only regional ITV company to ever fail on financial grounds – Wales (West and North) Television or 'Teledu Cymru'. It is a complex and fascinating history that uncovers strong feelings among the Welsh elite with regard to what they saw as the encroaching tide of Anglo-American culture via commercial television. One example of this reaction was a radical fifteen-page pamphlet published in 1962 in the Welsh language entitled *Teledu Mamon* ('Mammon's Television') which passionately argued against the proposed company. However, as it was actually written by Aneurin Talfan Davies (at that time Assistant Head of Programmes at the BBC in Cardiff), its inspiration may not have been entirely partisan. In this chapter Medhurst provides a detailed and fluid account of an aspect of ITV history often overlooked by more general historical discussions.

As this brief appraisal of the ten separate chapters suggests, there is a good deal here to interest many different readers. However, perhaps the major issue is not whether each article provides an interesting thesis on 'ITV culture' in its own right, but whether the book works as a coherent

collection of articles presenting a common theme and a consistent set of debates. Although some readers may prefer a more traditional guide to broadcasting history, my sense is that there is enough common ground to bring many of the different chapters together, albeit in a style that does not adhere to a linear or chronological structure. I also think that, whatever its short-comings and blind-spots, the book should be praised in its commendable attempt to bring more academic attention to the history and culture of ITV. This is particularly important at a time when the intellectual perception of the 'commercial' and 'the popular' are in a state of radical transformation. As Matt Hills suggests in the last chapter, 'ITV cultures, and commercial television more generally . . . require urgent revisionist attention: books like the one you are reading now can only be a welcome starting point' (p. 184).

Glen Creeber, *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen*. London: BFI, 2004, 184pp, and Jonathan Bignell and Stephen Lacey (eds), *Popular Television Drama: Critical Perspectives*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005, 230pp.

GLYN DAVIS

At the *Cultures of British Television Drama* conference held in September 2005 at the University of Reading, one of the event's participants voiced a personal concern that the field of television studies now seems to lack the political drive and force that it had in the 1980s. Perhaps this is a generational issue, she suggested; younger academics writing about television just aren't as politicized as those that led and contributed to the discipline twenty-five years ago. Certainly, with the recent dispiriting rise of the flimsy pop-academic edited collection devoted to single (almost always American) television series threatening to overwhelm certain publishers' catalogues, the days of *Days of Hope* debates can seem long gone.¹ Reassuringly, however, the two books under review here both contain healthy, hearty doses of politics within their pages – indeed, this constitutes one of the major strengths of both texts. This may not be the committed Marxism or socialism of the *Days of Hope* critics; but then, as Creeber acknowledges in *Serial Television*, 'there has been a shift in the very nature of what "politics" may actually mean to a contemporary audience' (p. 118).

Substantial chunks of Creeber's book have been previously published in other places: as journal articles, as essays in his own edited volume *Fifty Key Television Programmes*² and as pieces in other editors' collections, but *Serial Television*, on the whole, does not seem cut-and-pasted together from these sources. Rather, it offers a coherent, sustained and optimistic argument about the possibilities, potential and textual pleasures of serialized television drama. Twelve lengthy case studies

1 See the essays contained in Tony Bennett et al. (eds), *Popular Film and Television* (London: BFI/Open University Press, 1981).

2 Glen Creeber, *Fifty Key Television Programmes* (London: Arnold, 2004).

- 3 Robin Nelson, *TV Drama in Transition: Forms, Values and Cultural Change* (London and New York, NY: Macmillan, 1997).

provide the grounding for this argument; the programmes chosen are divided by genre into four chapters centred on historical epics, 'experimental' series, crime narratives and what Creeber calls 'soap drama'. The value and appropriateness of some of the case studies in putting forward specific views is open to debate. For instance, I suspect that *Cold Lazarus* (Channel 4/BBC, 1996) was chosen because of Creeber's ongoing interest in the oeuvre of Dennis Potter, when perhaps other examples of 'alternative' drama, such as *Wild Palms* (Fox, 1993) or *Six Feet Under* (HBO, 2001–5), might have served as more productive and illuminating comparisons. However, within and across chapters, the case studies generally operate as useful and interesting counterpoints to each other.

The introduction to the book outlines a clear and forceful polemic in favour of serial drama. Taking on those television critics who lament the passing of the single play on the small screen, and who perceive serial drama as increasingly formulaic and 'soap-like', Creeber argues in favour of the series' extended time frame, 'breadth of vision', 'narrative scope' and 'ability to construct "open" rather than "closed" narrative forms' (p. 4). Significantly, Creeber draws on Robin Nelson's notion of the 'flexi-narrative' television drama series – in which a number of different story strands are interweaved, sometimes connecting with each other, and not all necessarily attaining resolution – and suggests in accord with Nelson 'that the "flexi-narrative" form better responds to and reveals the complexity, ambiguity and lack of closure that typifies the contemporary world' (p. 5).³ Indeed, *Serial Television* could be seen as a book-length exploration of this supposition. Furthermore, rather than rejecting the claim that much contemporary television drama is 'soap-like', Creeber argues that this is to serial drama's benefit. "'Soap opera" techniques', he writes, 'have now become the very means by which "radical" and "progressive" drama is frequently conceived and constructed for a contemporary audience' (p. 12). The term 'soap-like' – so often used as a criticism or as a synonym for shallow formulaic laziness – is here reevaluated, and identified as a politically positive constituent of much contemporary serial drama. It is to Creeber's credit that he then goes on to demonstrate the validity of this argument throughout his subsequent chapters.

The two strongest expressions of this view occur in chapters one and four. In the first chapter, which focuses on the historical miniseries *Roots* (ABC, 1977), *Holocaust* (NBC/Titus, 1978) and *Heimat* (WDR/SFB, 1984), a provocative comparison is made between specific examples of the historical serial drama and films by Steven Spielberg which attempt to confront the same periods of history. *Roots* is compared with *Amistad* (1997), and *Holocaust* to *Schindler's List* (1993). In this context, Spielberg's films are found wanting in relation to the strengths of serial television. As Creeber puts it,

the very length and even the ‘soapiness’ of the serial’s form . . . makes it an ideal vehicle through which politics and history can be understood; not as mere ‘fact’ or ‘polemic’, but as ‘*memory*’ and ‘*experience*’ . . . In particular, the twin characteristics of ‘intimacy’ and ‘continuity’ which the historical miniseries shares with soap opera, mean that it can *transform* history so that it gradually becomes identifiable, empathetic and discursive to a mass audience (p. 42; italics in original).

It is therefore no surprise, suggests Creeber, that Spielberg attempted to make up for the limitations of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) by utilizing the ‘broader canvas’ (p. 42) of the historical series with *Band of Brothers* (HBO, 2000).

In the final chapter of *Serial Television*, Creeber examines the politics of ‘soap drama’ – ‘a new subgenre . . . that incorporates and combines important elements of soap opera, drama, comedy and comedy drama’ (p. 115). Exploring *This Life* (BBC, 1996–7), *Queer as Folk* (Channel Four, 1999–2000) and *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998–2004), Creeber argues:

The growth of ‘soap drama’ . . . could actually reveal a growing interest in and awareness of ‘micro’ as opposed to ‘macro’ politics. In other words, these ‘soap dramas’ reveal an explicit concern with the personal and private ‘politics’ of everyday life rather than concentrating on grand political issues and wider socio-economic debates (p. 116).

He goes on to claim that ‘soap drama’ ‘does so in such a way that the political nature of the personal . . . is explored and examined more powerfully and thoroughly than ever before’ (p. 116). Thus, *Queer as Folk* is praised for having been filmed and narratively constructed from a gay male perspective, affording original and provocative insights into the contemporary experience of queer life in Britain, whilst *This Life*’s two series enabled sustained exploration of the lives of a group of twenty-somethings, including their relationships to contemporary gender politics.

There are two particular issues that Creeber does not address in *Serial Television* which would have strengthened the arguments he puts forward. Firstly, there is little on the institutional frameworks within which the series he discusses were produced. He compares British, American, German and Danish series with each other, but does not consider the complications of trying to construct arguments about serial fiction across national borders (and national television institutions) in any depth. Secondly, the focus in the book is on ‘quality’ series. I would have liked space devoted to other serial television fictions that are not considered to be ‘quality’ television. For instance, how would the series made by Shed Productions – such as *Footballers’ Wives* (ITV, 2002–) or *Bad Girls* (ITV, 1999–) – support or undermine the positions put forward? These are minor concerns, however: Creeber’s book is to be

- 4 Jonathan Bignell, Stephen Lacey and Madeleine MacMuraugh-Kavanagh (eds), *British Television Drama: Past, Present and Future* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000).

commended for forthrightly demonstrating serial drama's ability to engage audiences in political concerns, whether these are at a 'micro' or 'macro' level.

The politics of television drama – in relation to gender, sexuality, nationhood, class and age – also appear in selected essays in Bignell and Lacey's edited volume. The book is one of the outcomes of a three year AHRB-funded project *Cultures of British Television Drama 1960–82*. It thus immediately invites comparison with their previous coedited book, *British Television Drama: Past, Present and Future*.⁴ That collection appealingly contained contributions from television practitioners alongside television studies academics. However, it also suffered from the brevity of individual contributions. *Popular Television Drama*, in contrast, is a more cohesive collection of work, with each of its eleven essays allowed room to breathe. As with any edited collection, some of the essays are of a higher standard than others, yet the strongest engage with social and political concerns relating to television drama, its production and consumption, and do so through a variety of methodological approaches.

In particular, it is worth praising the contributions made to the book by Julia Hallam and Helen Wheatley, each offering feminist appraisals of particular programmes. Hallam – drawing on some tentative audience research that she acknowledges is far from comprehensive or scientifically flawless – revisits the sitcom *Butterflies* (BBC, 1978–83), written by Carla Lane, and argues that it serves as a fascinating female intervention into a genre that, at the time, was largely a male preserve in terms of production and assumed audience. She discusses the connections between *Butterflies*' depiction of marital boredom and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), positioning this against Lane's ambivalent attitudes to feminism. The filming style and costume are examined; the 'dream of escape' narrative prominent in each episode is also linked to those of 1940s British films such as *Brief Encounter* (Lean, 1945). In the process, the complex texture of the series and its significance for its audience are revealed whilst the lack of critical attention given to Lane is exposed. Wheatley examines adaptations of Gothic fiction for the small screen, focusing on *Rebecca* (ITV, 1997), *The Wyvern Mystery* (BBC, 2000) and *The Woman in White* (BBC, 1997). She situates these programmes within the broad historical and popular cultural context of Gothic fiction for women, discussing novels, movies and television, and highlighting differences and continuities between these media forms. She examines the way in which the Gothic television fictions she discusses are marketed towards a female audience, and how specific textual features – voiceover, camera work and repeated thematic elements – serve to construct a female mode of address that is often 'inherently medium-reflexive' (p. 153). She ends her essay by arguing:

The impact of the domestic viewing context brings the female viewer's fears relating to her home and domestic relationships into

stark relief, offering a textual space in which these anxieties may be exposed, and, perhaps, worked through. Through the emphatic depiction of the Gothic heroine on television as a diegetic reader-viewer, a sense of cathartic solidarity may be established between the victimised woman on screen and the viewer at home (p. 162).

Thus, as with Hallam's analysis of *Butterflies*, Wheatley reveals the political potential of a popular dramatic television form for its women viewers.

Steve Blandford's essay on BBC television drama production in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales in the 1990s is also a thoughtful and provocative contribution to the collection. Blandford offers a coruscating critique of the impact of decisions made by executives in London on the drama output in the 'national regions'. In relation to BBC Scotland, for instance, he praises *Tutti Frutti* (1987) as 'genuinely innovative' (p. 170), but notes that throughout the 1990s, drama output from BBC Scotland became 'undoubtedly more blandly palatable to a UK and overseas "tourist" market' (p. 173), as represented by such series as *Monarch of the Glen* (2000–2005). Blandford concludes that:

The BBC remains, in a sense, a major instrument of what some would see as enduring colonial power. In turn, its popular channel's vision of the new devolved nations remains resolutely wedded to 'dominant imagery and traditional iconography' or, in the case of Wales, precious little representation at all (p. 179).

That Blandford draws attention to these limitations, elisions and omissions is to be welcomed; clearly the problems with funding, production and representation he identifies are a serious cause for concern.

To isolate these three essays for comment, obviously, is to exclude the significant contributions made by others. Jonathan Bignell's essay on *Doctor Who* (BBC, 1963–), which uses production archives to reconstruct the makings of the first run of the science-fiction serial, identifies the ways in which discourses of quality and popularity impinged on the programme's content and reception. Máire Messenger Davies' analysis of the children's television series *The Demon Headmaster* (BBC, 1995–8) draws on interviews with production personnel, ethnographic audience research with young audiences, and textual analysis to explore the need for – and discursive potential of – television specifically for children. Finally, Lez Cooke's piece on *Clocking Off* (BBC, 2000–2003) assesses the ways in which the Red Productions drama updates the key themes and concerns of traditional 'social realism' associated with the *Wednesday Play* (BBC 1964–70) and *Play for Today* (BBC 1970–84) for a twenty-first-century audience.

In conclusion, the content of both of these books suggests that – in varied ways – political argument, insight and commentary are not absent from contemporary television studies, but are in fact thriving. Granted,

this may not be in the service of a totalizing discourse such as Marxism. However, as Creeber acknowledges, in Britain and elsewhere, the contemporary television landscape, the nature of national and personal politics and the involvement of a country's citizens in political affairs are all significantly different from thirty years ago. In relation to such a marked cultural shift, it is unsurprising that the ways in which we think and talk about television have themselves also altered.